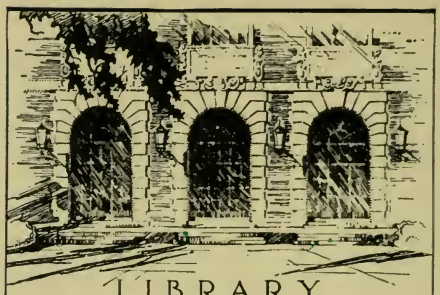

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CÆSAR BORGIA;

AN

HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "WHITEFRIARS."

Know ye the land where the cypress and myrtle
Are emblems of deeds that are done in their clime ?
Where the rage of the vulture, the love of the turtle,
Now melt into sorrow, now madden to crime ?

BYRON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
HENRY COLBURN, PUBLISHER,
GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1846.

LONDON:
GEORGE WOODFALL AND SON,
ANGEL COURT, SKINNER STREET.

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CÆSAR BORGIA.

CHAPTER I.

"As one who drinks from a charmed cup,
Of foaming and sparkling and murmuring wine,
While a mighty Enchantress filling up,
Invites to love with her lips divine."

SHELLEY.

WILLIAM of Bampton, the ancient servitor who performed the functions of squire with Le Beaufort, and who commanded his little band of men-at-arms under him, seemed only to wait for the disastrous termination of the tournament to add to the young knight's troubles. He had been chosen, from his age and fidelity, rather as a guide and controller of the hot youth than merely to fulfil the duties of his service; but he exhibited little skill in the time or manner in which he now thought proper to vent a discontent of some standing. Secretly—it might almost be said even to himself—fired with a passion which the voluptuous climate was fast making irresistible; flushed with the

applause of Lucrezia and with the glory and universal admiration he had just acquired in her sight; exasperated with Alfonso's revilings and open hostility; it may be thought that it was with much concealed impatience that, on the morning after the tournament, Le Beaufort listened to a long general tirade against the women of all foreign lands, and those of Italy in particular, in which the squire indulged. But he dared not attempt to refute these dogmata, more especially as Bampton passed, by some unspoken transition, to the praises of his cousin and betrothed, the Lady Alice Beaufort, and abruptly declared that he ought to lose no time in procuring the dispensation for their union, which his favour with the pope's niece would enable him easily to obtain.

The observation was so true, and there was that in the old man's eye and in his own heart which so seconded the argument, that, in a moment of shame and alarm, Sir Reginald promised to apply for the dispensation immediately. But several days elapsed, and though he was continually in Lucrezia's society, and importuned by the faithful squire, he had never once opened his mouth on the subject to her. Yet it is perfectly true that he never entered the Vatican without convincing himself that he meant to make the application; but no sooner was he in it than all resolutions relating to the subject, and often all recollections, vanished from his mind. Unluckily Bampton himself furnished him with an argument against his own, by urging the danger of a longer tarriance in Italy after having provoked the wrath of the powerful princes of Ferrara. Sir Reginald fired at the thought

of retiring from motives of personal fear, and the events of the Consistory gave him a reasonable plea; and when Bampton imagined he had gained a great point in prevailing upon him to promise that he would leave Rome directly the affair of the prize was decided, and would meanwhile use the first favourable opportunity to obtain the dispensation, he little knew that he was assisting the youth to a sedative which he laid on all the starts and prickings of his conscience.

In justice to the English knight, it must, however, be recorded that the result of the meditations of a restless night which followed Cæsar's farewell banquet, in which Lucrezia had undisguisedly distinguished him, was, that on the next day he would hasten among the first to her presence, and endeavour to win a private moment in which to make his request. Inasmuch as Lucrezia's influence was absolute, this was of course a much more advisable plan than applying to the avaricious and slow ministry of the Datary. To assure himself of his resolution, and perhaps for some other vague reason, Le Beaufort communicated his intention to the Orsino, who, however, earnestly pressed him to defer it, for any suspicion which might have crossed his imagination was removed, and his affection restored in full tide, by the young knight's generous demeanour at the tournament. Yet these kind efforts seemed only to strengthen Le Beaufort's contrary determination; until in the glow of friendship and triumph, Paolo entreated him to remain to be present at his nuptials with Donna Lucrezia. Then, under strict injunctions

of secrecy, he confided to him a secret compact into which the barons of the confederacy had entered with Cæsar. While he was engaged at Milan in lulling the suspicions of the French, they were to assemble their forces under pretence of attacking Piombino, and restoring it to the dominion of the church, which had long contended with the family Appiano for its possession. Instead of which, on Cæsar's rejoining them, they were suddenly to fall upon Tuscany, and restore the Medici. Thus strengthened, the pontiff would no longer dare to trifle with the Orsini in their demand of his daughter's hand; after obtaining which, Paolo laughingly intimated that Cæsar's projects on Ferrara would wait long for their accomplishment.

Le Beaufort's reflections on this extraordinary glimpse into the involved workings of Italian policy were soon absorbed in others more pleasurable, though certainly not to the Orsino. Fantastic diplomas, richly arabesqued with emblems of the passion, were brought to them, constituting them doctors in an Academy of Love founded by Donna Lucrezia, for the purpose of converting the Knight of St. John to its pleasurable tenets.

This device was in the scholastic taste of the age, beautified by the warm and poetical imagination of Lucrezia. Of her most favoured female companions and retinue, secure in her own empery, she had culled twenty of those most gifted with beauty and alluring talents, who, with an equal number of men selected for analogous qualities, including the Orsino and Sir Reginald, Bembo, Machiavelli, the Cardinal of Me-

dici, and others distinguished for their brilliant wit or poetic genius, composed the academy of which she was herself the president. Its professed object was to convert the recusant Hospitaller to the sweet doctrines of Love, which the Academicians were to unite in explaining and illustrating to him; and for this purpose were to meet every evening, in places designated by the bright president, either in the Vatican, her gardens, or the palaces of the friends to whom she deigned so great an honour, with exception of three days in each week, which, as the indulgence against Lent was now at an end, were to be spent by all in retirement and devotion. The first sessions was ordered to be held in the vineyard of the Vatican, as the fine gardens covering the elevation now occupied by the Belvedere were styled; and not until a week after Cæsar's departure, when the Hospitaller might be supposed to have recovered from the suffering inflicted by his wounds.

This event was impatiently expected by Alfonso: he burned to satisfy himself, by his own observation, of the degree of intelligence which Lucrezia and the English knight had as yet attained, and he was besides tormented with a ravening desire to see her, for, after all, it was a physical delight to gaze upon her beauty, though with the eye of a forever banished spirit looking through the bars of Eden. He thought they never would—but the day and hour both came at last.

The place of meeting was one which the seneschal of the Decameron would have selected as fit for the reception of his luxurious masters, where every sur-

rounding object was in harmony with the delicious and charmed existence which they had devised in defiance of death. Arcades of vines, matted with the bright green foliage of spring and showery with blossoms, ascended in winding terraces to a height on which they converged as into a star, and formed a spacious canopy over an expanse of the brightest turf, inlaid with a mosaic of flowers, in the centre of which was a fountain which arose to a great height in the clear sky, and kept up a perpetual coolness and refreshing harmony of waters. Between the interstices of the vines, magnificent views of the whole surrounding country and of the city were visible; to which circumstance, perhaps, or to the effect of an infinity of roses which grew among the vines, and the lofty cypresses which made the elevation a conspicuous object in every direction, it owed its designation of the Belvedere.

Alfonso had yet the resolution to make himself among the last to arrive; and then, ascending the first terrace, he found that a precaution was taken which increased his suspicions. All who passed a guard of beautiful children arrayed as cupids, who defended it with their little silver bows, resigned their weapons, and were compelled to pledge their honour that they would use perfect courtesy and harmony with all whom they encountered. The impatient Hospitaller was obliged to promise this too, and hastening on, soon found himself in the midst of the newly founded Academy.

A circular tapestry, richly wrought with a vast design of flowers and fruit, was spread before the

fountain, around which, on green velvet cushions, in low chairs of twisted branches, sat the Academicians of Love, twenty judiciously paired on each side of the president's seat, which was raised above the rest on a dais of green turf. And there sat Lucrezia, in all her loveliness, with a diadem wrought of myrtle and roses on her head to distinguish her dignity, the rest wearing only garlands of the same texture. Sir Reginald and the Orsino sat on her right and left, and immediately opposite, on the farther side of the circle, was the place reserved for the recusant whom it was the business of the assembly to convert.

When Alfonso entered, Lucrezia was in laughing discourse with Le Beaufort; and there was something in the unrestrained vivacity of her coquetry, and even in the deep glow of the passion in his looks, which calmed the jealous fears of the prince. But he liked not the rush of colour with which she turned from Sir Reginald to greet him with cold and reserved courtesy, nor the visible anxiety with which, while affecting to command it by some irrecusable authority, she ordered all present to pledge themselves to uninterrupted harmony and friendliness during the sittings of the Academy. Le Beaufort, with a glance of no slight meaning at Alfonso, declared that he reserved his rights until then; and with an ample return of the look, Alfonso signified his assent. He then took his seat—the only one in the assembly ungarlanded.

And now the beautiful presidentess was unanimously called upon to explain for what purposes she had founded the Academy, and the services she ex-

pected from those whom she had distinguished by creating them members of so blissful a court. And it was with scarcely a glance at the pretended object, but with a continual play of smiles and blushes at Sir Reginald, that she delivered a musical harangue in reply. To convert so stern and obstinate a recusant of love as the Knight of Ferrara, she announced to be the difficult and glorious purpose of the foundation; and as love was so delicious and priceless a good, that it was only possible to be despised by those who were ignorant of its value, the Academicians were to devote their meetings to the recital of tales illustrative of its effects and power, whether in good or evil passages of adventure and fate; to singing songs in praise or description of the passion; to answering or freely disputing any doubts which the recusant might devise; each sessions concluding with dances and music and innocent revelries, and aught else capable of inspiring the divine sentiment to which the Hospitaller alone, of all things animate and even inanimate, was a rebel! To avoid the tediousness of ceremonial forms, each was to assume a name derived from some allusion, which might render it pleasing to himself, and by which only he or she was to be known and addressed in the Academy.

Bembo immediately proposed, that as the centre and sun of all their happiness, and of this enchanting device, Lucrezia should be designated simply—Light. Lucrezia instantly turned to Sir Reginald, and inquired if he would be her Girasol, or sun-flower; and on his eager acceptance of this singular title, Alfonso declared that he desired to be called Dark-

ness, since his opinions were held to be the reverse of those entertained by the illustrissima. He scarcely dreamed what harm he had done himself by the involuntary betrayal which the fierce vivacity of his manner conveyed; but a single glance and a woman's quick instinct showed Lucrezia that his rivalry might be stirred.

This preliminary arranged, with much laughter and pleasant guessing, and raillery at the secrets included in the selected pseudonyms, Lucrezia summoned Bembo to open the proceedings in the manner which he thought best. The canon, who was thoroughly replunged into all his old fascination, smilingly declared it would be proper, in the first place, to agree upon some general definition of what love was, of whose laws they professed themselves to be expounders.

The proposal was universally accepted; and there ensued a dialogue the brilliancy and eloquence of which might entitle it to preservation in these records, but for the too rich and luxurious colouring which the manners of the age and land permitted. Plato himself might have been puzzled at the spiritual subtlety of some of the definitions, and Sappho have blushed at the material glow of others, while the whole company laughed immoderately at the young Northman's blunt but passionate declaration of the feeling which worked in his heart, when he thought he was but following the general example. The Orsino defined love—a desire to be the air around Lucrezia; while Machiavelli, mocking this refinement, announced that, in his opinion, it was a long-

ing to be caught in a net by Vulcan. Alfonso was, of course, supposed to be ignorant of the matter altogether; but Lucrezia's definition struck him as most disconsonant with her character. Love, she said, was a desire of the soul to mingle with another, to escape from a loneliness which else makes the whole universe a solitude. The Cardinal of Medici declared that he had experienced nothing of love but its pains, and therefore could give but such a delineation as a picture might be in which all the lights were left out. Bembo, who had been watching his opportunity for some time, emphatically announced that he was in a somewhat similar condition, inasmuch as he had only tasted three of the delights of love, which were twelve in number.

This arithmetical limitation immediately excited the attention of the ladies, and of Donna Lucrezia, who smilingly commanded him to enumerate them for the enlightenment of others who might be as ignorant as she professed herself to be. The roguish canon pretended at first to excuse himself, and finally, declaring he would rhyme it, that it might have a better chance of being remembered, recited the following lines, which he intended that the audience should regard as an impromptu, but which, from its great resemblance to a poem of Lorenzo de' Medici, was not, perhaps, the inspiration of the moment:—

LOVE'S DELIGHTS.

"The first delight of love—oh! 'tis to gaze!
The second, but to touch the loved one's hand;
The third, with tremulous voice her charms to praise;
The fourth, to obey her most despised command;

The fifth, to upbraid her smiles and cruel ways ;
The sixth, to sit beside her, hushed and bland ;
The seventh, to snatch the first kiss—chastely warm ;
The eighth, to clasp her, scolding, to the breast ;
The ninth, to half devour each rosying charm ;
The tenth, to feel with answering ardour pressed ;
The eleventh, to be alone—doors locked on harm ;—
The twelfth—sweet dames ! your colours have long guessed !"

In spite of all efforts to restrain themselves, Lucrezia and her ladies could not forbear betraying some consciousness by the sudden laughter which this termination provoked; but she rapidly returned to the topic, and the discussion was renewed with unabated brilliancy until the moon rose in the deep blue twilight. The sweetness and languid splendour of the hour well suited the converse, and time passed with the rapidity of all things delightful in this mortal life, until a messenger arrived who brought intelligence that the pontiff's supper was served, a meal which, it appeared, Lucrezia always partook with her sire. The whole Academy determined, however, to escort their beautiful president to the palace; and it was accompanied by their festive groups, in full career of gaiety and enjoyment, that, turning into a walk which led to the entrance of the Tor di Borgia, Lucrezia suddenly beheld a monk dart out of some bushes, kneel before her, and present a paper folded in the form of a letter.

Lucrezia's vivacity instantly disappeared; and turning pale and trembling, she took the letter, broke it hurriedly open, desiring the monk to rise, which,

however, he would not, but still knelt with his hands clasped in very earnest supplication.

"I cannot—I must not—I will not!" she said at last, in a wavering and confused voice. "Tell Friar Bruno none lament his imprisonment more than I, but it is impossible. Bid him wait—a few days may bring great changes. Tell him—Alas, alas! 'tis not my pitilessness indeed!—but that he should deem I am doing what I dare not confess to him, and so will not intercede for him!—Signor Orsino, you shall see that I do not aid your ill-wishers! Tell him, Fra Biccocco, that his words offend me, and he must choose himself another intercessor."

At this sentence, which Biccocco was far from expecting, the faithful confrère sobbed aloud, mingling entreaties with exclamations against himself for having, with his inadvertent prate, given a handle to his learned master's enemies. But Lucrezia repulsed him with a harshness foreign to her usual manner, and commanding the guard to remove the monk if he did not himself retire, she passed on with a look in which struggled shame and remorse with all her efforts to preserve the haughty and offended tone of her reply.

From all his observations, Alfonso had now no doubt that the Knight of England had supplanted him in the favour of Lucrezia, and that his own misery and his rival's happiness would soon be complete. He even concluded that, however innocently the first sessions of the new Academy had been spent, under her auspices it would rapidly degenerate into

licentiousness, and furnish her with the opportunities which fame declared she knew so well how to use.

And yet the pastime seemingly continued the brilliant intellectual revelry in which it commenced, which we might easily prove from the ample records that we find in the chronicle. And sorely are we tempted by the beauty, tenderness, or wit of most of the poems and legends which formed the chief amusement of those refined orgies, in which Lucrezia's part still retains a fragrance which baffles even the musty scent of the antique parchment; the tart wit of Machiavelli preserves its pungency and cynical brilliancy; the canon yet shines with an admirable but something too licentious gaiety; the gloom and love-longing of the Orsino yet inspire a kind of pity, and contrast with the frank and joyous humour of Sir Reginald, or the stately and austere dignity of the Hospitaller. So accurately are the characters and passions of the speakers reflected in the conversations and legends preserved, that it might materially aid our labour to detail them, but that we are hastening to more important events, and must therefore pass over the episode with this allusion to its great and perennial beauty.

Meanwhile, Lucrezia's spell worked powerfully on its intended victim. Surrounded by all that could kindle the voluptuous passions, the imagination stimulated with glowing poetry and the warm descriptions in which the narrators of those love-legends revelled, continually exposed to the influence of the marvellous beauty of Lucrezia, and the infinite variety of her allurements, the passion which devoured Alfonso hourly

increased in strength even with the struggles which he made to withstand it. The Lenten retirements which she had prescribed and religiously observed, heightened the delirium while apparently giving it time for a lucid interval. Absence taught him how necessary she had become to give any charm to his existence, and although the Hospitaller was well informed that she devoted these retirements to penance and ritual observances of the severest kind, which her paleness and languor on returning abundantly attested, he was tortured with fancies that her privacy might be devoted to purposes more consonant with her reported temperament. The rapturous joy of Sir Reginald at every reunion was his only consolation; for after his own experience, he placed no confidence in the espial of Mona Faustina, whom a double bribe might have allured to a double treason.

In proportion as this familiar intercourse revealed to Alfonso the full value of the prize he had lost, the rare union of loveliness with the most brilliant and yet feminine genius, the inexhaustible treasury of tenderness and sweetness in that fairest bosom which ever heaved, his jealousy deepened, and the anguish of his now despised love. For he could not doubt that it was so: her coldness to himself, and encouragement of Le Beaufort, were proofs, even if he had found it possible to forget the attempt which she had made, if not on his life, at least on his honour. To fortify the resolutions which this conviction should have matured, he endeavoured to use his position to obtain some proof against Lucrezia which might rouse an abhorrence in his soul to counteract her magic.

But in vain did he urge on himself the excessive fondness of the pontiff, which he displayed in the most unbounded indulgence; the secret conferences; the unlimited influence of Lucrezia over him: her beauty and talents, her aversion to Cæsar, the dangers which apparently thickened around the Borgian power urged reasons for all.

Ah, truly had the ballerina said that where the bright spirit of love comes not, the dark one will! And this began now to reason with him upon the madness of the sacrifice he had made—the supreme bliss which he had relinquished for a phantom—for what else was the scruple to which he had offered up the matchless happiness which once courted his acceptance? In what strange manner had he reversed all ordinary procedure of passion in his sex, and rejected the beauteous paramour because he could not bestow on her the holy and chaste qualities of the wife! What, though the soul must for ever remain isolated, when the unbounded feast of beauty was spread to all the senses! But was it yet too late, the tempter continued? She had loved him once, and still at moments in her glance flashed something of the past. Moreover, another danger became imminent. The Orsino's vehement suit was strengthened by events which seemed likely to compel its success; on political grounds indeed, for Lucrezia's coldness continued at the freezing point. Cæsar, after a stern reception, as was believed, and abrupt dismissal at Milan, had put himself at the head of the ecclesiastical army, as that of the barons was styled, which immediately invaded Tuscany with

every prospect of success in their project of restoring the Medici.

Revenge aided the arguments of the passion which was fast gaining the mastery in Alfonso's heart, suggesting that none of her draughts could be more bitter to the rivals who had injured him so deeply than his success with Lucrezia. These thoughts gradually worked into action. He defended himself less vehemently against the arguments of the Academicians of Love, and his altered manner and gaze speedily came to Lucrezia's cognizance. But those glances which revealed the furnace in his soul, and the glow of the unhallowed flames within, seemed only to disgust and offend Lucrezia—Lucrezia Borgia! The chaste coldness, or haughtiness and disdain, with which she now eyed him heightened the delirium of desire even with its very hopelessness. Severely rallied as he was on the declension of his rigid principles, Alfonso scarcely disguised how fast he was yielding to the arguments of his associates; and, clutching at every straw in his sinking of hope, the thought occurred to him that in announcing his conversion he might find occasion to avow his passion, and with its new glow rekindle her former feeling.

It must be admitted that the Knight of St. John struggled long with these suggestions of his frenzied passions; but at length they triumphed. And yet it is certain that he had formed no definite plan nor object, when on the eve of the next sessions of the Academy, after one of those torturing absences, he requested Mona Faustina to inform her lady its pre-

sident, that the convertite required only a short interview with her in private, to obtain satisfaction in some remaining doubts, to make his recantation before the assembly in the evening.

Alfonso's hopes, whatever they might be, brightened like the tints of a rainbow when the sun breaks out, on Faustina bringing him a reply that Donna Lucrezia was going on the following noon to her gardens of Egeria, and would give him audience there, before the Academy assembled, which she had ordered to meet in them on that occasion. This was the more remarkable that, ever since the tournament, under pretext of regard for his safety, Alfonso had been kept in a kind of honourable imprisonment in the Vatican, in which the sessions had always hitherto been held.

Almost for the first time since his arrival, Alfonso discarded his usual cumbrous habiliments; and though his garb was still principally of black velvet, the richness of its lace and embroidery displayed his princely person to advantage, and he had even crossed his breast with a silk scarf of Lucrezia's white. Confiding much more in the secrecy of his movements than in the protection of the attendance assigned to him, he left the palace unobserved, and arrived in the Valley of Egeria with a rush of passions and recollections which not only took from him all power but all wish of resistance—a far worse symptom!

Faustina was in waiting, and informed him that Donna Lucrezia had dismissed her ladies to amuse themselves at their pleasure in the gardens, and

gather the flowers which she was wreathing into garlands for the evening in a circular temple, made altogether of twisted branches and flowers, which formed the centre of a fantastic labyrinth or maze, called the Minotaur, from an antique statue of the monster which decorated it. Slipping a ring of great value on the old dame's finger, as a testimony, he said, of gratitude for her attentions during his illness, Alfonso hastened on as if he had wings to his feet; and yet his heart beat so thickly when he perceived the rose-matted arches of the temple through the leaves of the maze that he was obliged to pause to recover breath. At the moment a voice struck upon his ear, but not the voice of Lucrezia; and with a feeling almost of suffocation in the intensity of his agitation, Alfonso clutched aside some foliage to ascertain if his simultaneous suspicion was well founded.

The figure of the Minotaur was cast in brass, and resembled a monstrous bull couched on the marble pavement of the temple; and as it was supposed to have just received the blow of Theseus, the head was to the ground, and the massive neck and shoulders made a seat, of which Lucrezia had availed herself; for there she sat, assiduously twining a heap of flowers into garlands. Close at hand, against the pedestal of one of the pillars, leaned Sir Reginald, with several wreaths on his arm, as if it was the duty of his attendance to carry them, speaking in a low, deep, passionate tone, to which Lucrezia replied with laughing carelessness and gaiety, keeping her

eyes on her sylvan labour, and perhaps for that reason unconscious of the depth of the young Englishman's emotion.

The nearest approach which Le Beaufort had as yet won himself to make towards obtaining the object of his journey, was to inform Lucrezia that he had a petition to recommend to her furtherance, whenever she could waste so much time as to listen to it. On this morning he was surprised with a message from her, inviting him to attend her in her gardens before the Academicians assembled, that she might hear his request, and prefer it to the pontiff on her return to the palace. This message was delivered with an injunction to secrecy, which filled the youth with a wild tumult of hopes and fears, which he refused to suffer himself to examine, but resolutely shunning all thought, lest he should raise some obstacle in his own conscience and heart, obeyed.

Alfonso knew not that his approach was known to Lucrezia by a secret signal; but nearly at the instant when he came within earshot, the lady interrupted Le Beaufort's discourse. "Enough, signor," she said, "I am content on your knightly word to believe myself as fair as the sea-foam, if that will content you; but now let me hear that prayer you have to make, for we have good news from Milan, and his paternity is in a granting mood to-day."

Le Beaufort was silent for several moments; and then with a strong effort which escaped not observation, he replied by brokenly preferring his request for a dispensation to wed his cousin, formerly betrothed to his brother.

"You love an English girl, then,—and would leave me for ever?" said Lucrezia, with a lightning glance which shivered through the whole frame of Le Beaufort.

"I love, I love," he replied, turning pale and faltering—"I love—no, I adore, I worship thee! thee only! thee always, perfect Lucrezia! Away with every respect! let them slay me if they will by every death my falsehood deserves, but let it be here, at thy feet!" And he threw himself in an ecstasy of passion on his knees before her.

"You are in good place to let me try this wreath on, which I intend for your wear to-night," said Lucrezia with laughing carelessness, as if this were accustomed language, and playfully bending over him and putting on the garland. It is probable that she intended to exhibit her favour to the knight in a marked manner, but she miscalculated the force of the feeling which had thus overthrown every other in his breast—until she found herself encircled by the arms of Le Beaufort. Crimsoning with anger and shame, she instantly started up, repulsing him with a vivacity or rather fierceness which, combined with the uncertainty and mingled nature of his own emotions, instantly released her, she stepped from him, and exclaimed—"Is this thy faith to thy friend, and respect to the daughter of Alexander?—But yet," she added, with one of her sweet laughs, turning to the discomfited lover, and hearing Alfonso stir in his covert—"But yet—it is no sin to love as I know thy loyal nature but intends, with all thy soul!—so we will take it as a carnival jest, out of season, and

punish thee thus!" And she was throwing the flowers which she held in her hands at the confused and shame-struck knight when Alfonso entered on the scene.

Not ill-content to find that Sir Reginald's progress was so limited, and so suddenly checked, Alfonso saluted the lady with a warmth of manner that brought the haughty stain to her brow which Le Beaufort's audacity had not. And when, after stiff greetings exchanged with his rival, he reminded the lady that he had humbly requested a private audience, that he might the more freely confide his doubts for solution, she replied with marked coldness, "I feared your questions, knight, might be too difficult for an unlearned damsel to solve, and therefore I have called in, and must retain, the assistance of this wise young doctor of the Academy, who has already taught me many things I knew not, say men what they will of my science in love!"

Glooming as darkly as Le Beaufort brightened, Alfonso yet made an effort. "Firstly, lady," he said, with a glance which perchance was not so much without its effect as he imagined, "I would know, whether if ours once truly win the love of that sex which you make celestial by being of it—whether indeed real love in woman can ever so totally fade as to leave not a trace behind?"

"For *real* love, I know not, signor,—none than you know better I am incapable of it; but if a new and brighter picture be painted over a rude and chaotic sketch, the pity were that any should remain," replied Lucrezia, with so visible a coldness and dis-

dain that Alfonso was irritated to the highest degree.

"Then I relapse into all mine ancient heresies," he said, with acrimony. "I was ever averse to mingle with the herd; but to be loved as one of many—since that is woman's love—nothing allures, but rather forces my soul back to its calm!"

"The thought makes us shiver despite the sun!—Le Beaufort, approach, or we shall become an icicle!" said Lucrezia, disdainfully, and turning to the eager knight of England.

"I will take away the winter from your presence, lady, that Sir Reginald's warmth may not heat me too!" said Alfonso, bitterly; and he retired so suddenly that Lucrezia had no time to bid him stay, even had she been inclined; and not content with this departure, after a short solitary rumination, he left the valley, leaving some vague apology with Mona Faustina.

In this mood of indignation and despair, he sought out Bembo, and communicated what he had observed, with a sharp commentary that since the lovers had reached a mutual understanding, he desired not to witness the progress of Sir Reginald's treason, lest his indignation should find vent. He therefore ordered Bembo to excuse him from the meetings of the Academy and all other pleasurable society during the remainder of Lent, which his conscience upbraided with having hitherto not sufficiently observed for the member of a religious order.

Bembo declared that no one could count himself safe from such a woman, and obeyed with great

alacrity; and at night Alfonso received the agreeable intelligence that his absence had in nowise disturbed the hilarity of the company, and that on the contrary Lucrezia never seemed more gay and satisfied. He persisted with admirable sullenness in his resolution, and secluded himself almost continually in his apartment, as if absorbed in devotion; while the court only increased in the number and brilliancy of its festivals, and Bembo's own discontent and carpings at the favour now undisguisedly exhibited by Lucrezia to Sir Reginald, after his avowal, continually fed Alfonso's worst imaginings. At the same time he felt that all his motions were attentively watched, and he began to fear that he must almost regard himself as much a prisoner as a guest in the Vatican. Cæsar's return, which was to release the knights of the tournay, was meanwhile protracted; and the success of the Orsini in Tuscany seemed likely soon to enable them to dictate in Rome. Paolo's patience might in great measure be ascribed to this hope; when suddenly the scene changed.

The barons, by their ravages, had excited the undying hatred of the Florentines, and were hastening unresistedly on to besiege the capital—when the potent orders of the King of France arrested their career. The French army was now ready to march to the invasion of Naples; and Cæsar announced with an effect as great as that of a peal of thunder from a bright sky, that he must obey the king, who had restored him to his favour, and that the pope had agreed to send the ecclesiastical army with that of France on its invasion. Meanwhile he was com-

manded to withdraw from Tuscany, and proceed to the recovery of Piombino, until it was necessary to join the advance of the French.

The barons found themselves totally outwitted, and that they had no resource but to endeavour to bid with the Borgias for the favour of France. But even with their unwilling agency, Cæsar's conquests were so rapid and great that they infused equal astonishment and terror; and the advance of the French army became a source of congratulation to the barons themselves as putting a stop for a time to the torrent of his triumphs.

Still the masterpiece of perfidy in the compact with the Spaniards was undreamed until the arrival of the French generals with an army which seemed at first very inadequate to the enterprize which they had in hand; when after the celebration of a grand mass, in the presence of the pontiff, that ancient holy alliance was proclaimed by which Naples was divided between the French and Spaniards.

Glossed with some fair pretexts, and with accusations against the unfortunate Frederic, still the most unscrupulous politicians stared aghast at so palpable a breach of every principle of good faith in all the parties contracting. Some indeed could find apologies for the pontiff in the rebellious conduct of the King of Naples, his vassal, his open protection of the Roman malcontents against their suzerain, and above all of the poets whose verses infected the ear of Europe and of posterity with reports so foul. The declared hostility of the French might somewhat justify their use of the means of vengeance thus offered;

but the most reckless could devise no excuse for the perfidy of the Spaniards, the pretended allies and defenders of the monarch devoted.

The Orsini, and above all Paolo, felt that they had been playing at a game in which they were fairly beaten; and the undisguised triumph of the Borgias bitterly increased their mortification. But they were obliged to dissemble both their fears and chagrin, and they mustered in great numbers to attend the great banquet given by the pontiff to welcome the French generals, and to which Cæsar himself sent invitations to Sir Reginald and the Hospitaller, with information that, having consulted with the French chivalry, he intended to deliver his judgment on the tournament.

CHAPTER II.

"Come to me, ravens! I will give ye food."
Gaelic War Song.

Reports of the luxury and magnificence of the pontifical court had prepared the French leaders for a grand display, but all were amazed when, entering the immense hall of the Tor di Borgia, they beheld a spectacle which, lighted by the meridian sun of Italy, realized the most gorgeous legends of Assyrian magnificence. The lofty roofs glistering with gold, the walls hung with miracles of the restored arts of design, wrought in tapestry and velvet, extended as far as the eye could follow, terminating in a portico which descended by a succession of terraces into the Eden-like gardens of the palace, whose very foliage glistened like green silver in the bright atmosphere. The long vista was crowded with attendants in rich costumes, pages, and men-at-arms, to serve the banquet to the innumerable guests, for the pontiff had invited all but the common soldiery of the French army. About its centre the hall formed a circular saloon, over

which was a dome richly frosted with silver, and supported on pillars of white marble, with Corinthian capitals similarly chased. This was the chief place of the banquet, the pontiff sitting enthroned under a canopy which was elevated on a platform.

Lucrezia and her ladies, the commanders of the French army, and other principal guests were seated here, and the mingling of ecclesiastical costumes with those of women and laymen was not more incongruous than that of the devices of their ranks. The triple crosses of archbishops, and crosiers of bishops, mingled in the air with spears and flaming axes and the wands of heralds, for behind each chair stood either an ecclesiastic in his stiff gold-embroidered stole, or still more gorgeous herald, or plumed page, in attendance on lady or knight or priest. Statues, rescued from the ruins of art when art was divine, filled all the niches with the silent glory of their beauty. The polished marble floor reflected as if in oil the richly chased silver vases placed at intervals around the saloon, exhaling delicious odours from flowers whose profusion marked the influence of female taste. The tables were covered with gold damask, and blazed with jewelled vessels whose materials were the least part of their value. Magic could present no richer blaze of colour than the garbs of the guests, lit by the torrent of lustre which descended from the open dome above. The violet mantles, scarlet robes, and ermine caps of the cardinals, the gold wrought habits of the bishops, the gaudy military magnificence of

the French, the delicate splendour of the female costumes, the changing glow and rich confusion of the attire of the attendants, produced an ever shifting variety of glories like the rapid tints of air-bubbles in the sun.

The reports of his spies had of late much confused the calculations of Cæsar, and it was not without a pang of doubt that his eye fell on the English knight, whose grandiose person, blooming countenance, and superb habiliments attracted general notice, and a degree of envy and curiosity when it was observed with what beaming smiles Lucrezia distinguished him. Cæsar's brows, seldom betrayers of his thoughts, loured darkly when he noted the indifference with which she turned from the Hospitaller, and the deep gloom of the latter. He strove to stifle this uneasy feeling by launching into an excessive panegyric of Sir Reginald as he presented him to the French commanders, insomuch that the French were piqued at the lavish praises heaped on a stranger, and of a rival nation.

The banquet, however, proceeded with the usual pompous ceremonial. The enthusiasm which Lucrezia's beauty excited among the French chivalry was unbounded; and it blazed with unusual glory, for, too well aware of her dark reputation, she laboured to give it the lie by the contrast of brilliant gaiety and wit—unwont accompaniments of the dark and festering thoughts engendered by great crimes. Once or twice indeed Alfonso saw, by the secret swell of her beautiful bosom, that she sighed even when laughingly receiving the adulation of her new

adorers, but the sigh appeared to him that of voluptuous tenderness, understood by Le Beaufort. The sweet breath of the perfumes, the murmurs of the low toned music which accompanied without interrupting the conversation, the lustre of her loveliness, irritated this jealous thought by heightening the glow of passion. The light laughter which arose among the guests seemed in mockery of his anguish; every exaggerated compliment to the sovereign beauty struck him as insulting denials addressed obliquely to himself.

The scene at length became too irksome even for Cæsar's dissimulation, and he said with singular abruptness—"But we miss a rare jest! tell me, fair sister and beauteous dames, what success had ye in warming the ice in your prisoner's breast? for ye are to understand, French gentlemen, this religious knight is a despiser of all ladies and gentlewomen, and boasts himself impregnable to their fiercest attacks."

"If, knight, thou hast not yielded thee at mercy, without hope of rescue or ransom, to the unmatched beauty of yonder lady, call thyself none; for, by my father's beard! the angels from heaven might descend unblamed from heaven to worship it!" said the old commander, Louis de la Tremouille.

"Nay, we have found the ice so hard, that albeit we have all shone on it incessantly, it grew but the more fixed," said Lucrezia, with a momentary paleness.

"Hear then my judgment, solemnly debated in the presence of the Lord Louis of France, and of

his noblest peers," said Cæsar, suddenly. "Inasmuch as all who beheld the tourney acquit the Lord Orsino and Le Beaufort of aught but misfortune in the misadventure of their competitor, and their merits and glories were adjudged equal; we declare that the prize can only be lovingly determined in actual feats of war and hardihood; and that therefore he of the three who shall, in the decision of a quest of ladies, braveliest demean him in effecting this conquest of Naples which we march on, shall win the wreath of triumph. Thus may we learn if women's idols are the realities, or but the glittering shows of the strength and valour which, forsooth, they find in those who have enough of either to master themselves. Tell me, ladies, knights, and peers, say I well?"

A general burst of applause from all but the Hospitaller replied; even the martial spirit of Alexander took fire, and with a loud voice he pronounced his approval. Sir Reginald turned with a quivering and impassioned look to Lucrezia, who visibly whitened. But she felt that Cæsar's eye was fixed intently upon her, and she said, in a low tone, "The Knight of St. John deems the quarrel not worth pursuing; and therefore I trust we damsels need not hazard our champion in so rude a wager."

Alfonso was in truth altogether taken by surprise, and although, as the fast ally of France, he felt that to serve under her banner thus privately was a politic compliment, it was this concern for Le Beaufort's safety which determined him.

"I accept the challenge, signor," he said; "the

rather that chance may spare my sword an else necessary chastisement, whose edge old recollections blunt."

Le Beaufort's eyes sparkled, and he was about to give a vehement reply, when Lucrezia, to the general surprise, laid her hand on his arm, and restrained him by the gesture, like a blood-steed that obeys the finest check.

"Peace, peace, I pray you all!" she said, with a singularly fierce and sudden glance at Cæsar. "Against the noblest chivalry of the world would I freely stake a good cause on the sword of the Knight of England; and therefore marvel not that I esteem him as ever our cowardly sex hath honoured valour. But for all of you I do profess this love that none shall incur aught of evil which I will not lament—and if it may be—*avenge* to the uttermost!"

This strange phrase had little time to be commented on, for Ives d'Allegre, commander of the Gascons, pettishly exclaimed, "You speak, noble lady, as an the knight were as hard to cope withal as St. George himself, or Sir Achilles of Greece! I match myself with no such men of proof, yet, by death and life! the best knight of England may find among us one to take the vaunt out of him."

"So far as the worst may serve your turns, my lord, I am here!" said Le Beaufort, firing. "I trust I have not altogether forgotten my grandsire's lesson, when he told me by what means he came to be present at the coronation of our English baby, Harry the Sixth, in Paris."

"Fairly answered, gosling of Mars!" said La Tremouille, laughing good-humouredly. "Note ye this boast, gentlemen of France; and if the smiles of your ladies cannot win you to snatch the glory from this sharp-tongued Englishman, let the remembrance of his vaunt!"

And thus was this singular contest protracted, which began to attract a general attention in the chivalrous courts of Europe. And it seemed to be hastening to a solution. The French army tarried only a few days on its march, and the Romans had still another grand spectacle in witnessing the departure of the array, which the whole pontifical court also beheld from the ramparts of Santangelo. The French forces, without the Spanish treachery, even flushed as they were with the recent conquest of Milan, and the recollection of the easy conquests of Charles VIII., must have been considered very inadequate to their object. But their twelve thousand were principally composed of the flower of the valiant chivalry of France, and of Swiss infantry whose discipline and experience rendered them almost irresistible in the field, and the Roman barons composed about five thousand more. It was a noble and stirring pomp to behold the long lines of pikemen, arquebusiers, archers, cannon, and glittering cavalry, with their blue standards sown with golden lilies, innumerable pennons, forests of spears and lances, above all of which towered the lofty pikes of the Swiss, passing over the bridge of Santangelo; while the court and ladies on the ramparts waved farewell, the pontiff stretched his benediction, the populace shouted, and

the cannon roared in deafening concert with the clangor of trumpets and drums.

Unheeding that, for almost the first time, Paolo's eyes dwelt upon him with suspicion, Sir Reginald appeared with the torn scarf preciously worn round his neck, which Alfonso had formerly rejected. Those who watched closely thought that Lucrezia kissed her hand specially at the young English knight; and Bembo himself observed, that as the last standard disappeared, a rush of tears came to her eyes.

"Who is it hath won the glory of this sorrow, gentlest lady?" said the canon, speaking in a tone of tenderness which he had never until now ventured to assume.

"'Tis not in my nature, all men know, to smile for one—therefore, nor weep," replied Lucrezia, with strained vivacity. "It but saddened me to think how few of all that multitude shall return to glad their mothers' and their loved-ones' longing eyes!"

The walls of Rome were soon left behind the advancing host, and the Campagna extended its funereal solitudes around them. Ruins and scattered tombs, the everlasting arches of the aqueducts, wastes of long grass, covered the whole extent of view even to the sea on one hand, and on the other to the low purple lines of distant mountains.

To the more penetrating the policy of the Borgias began to give some significant indications. Cæsar suddenly published a decree by which the whole estates of the Colonna were forfeited, and stimulated the Orsini to renew the former bitter animosities, by ravaging their estates on the march, and seizing all

either for the pontiff or themselves. And the matter became still more perceptible in the operations which Alexander commenced immediately the forces of the confederacy were out of sight, in crushing divers of the inferior barons, and in obtaining possession of their strongholds, under various pretexts.

Bestowing no thought on the magnificent beauty of the country they traversed, the invaders plunged into the Tartarean wastes of the Pontine Marshes. Not then, as now they are drained, a pestilential Eden of fruitfulness, but an immense morass bounded in some directions by funereal forests and wide sea-wastes, in others by mountains on whose remote crags castles and cities gleamed incessantly into view. The hot and sulphureous air hung over them like a canopy, and a vague sentiment of doubt and awe fell on the boldest spirits, as if in reality they were traversing the magic land of Circe. The soldiery, imbued with the legends of popular credulity, and struck with the loveliness and desolation of the oases which sometimes arose like magic islands of verdure and bloom amidst the wide desart, imagined they were the haunts of fairies, who had thus richly adorned them to tempt the unwary traveller.

The glory for which the rivals were to struggle seemed, however, to fly before them. The unfortunate King of Naples, bewildered by the multitude of his enemies, had resolved to confine his efforts to the defence of his fortified cities. The nearest of these was Capua; and Cæsar now publicly declared that, by means of a secret intelligence which he possessed in the town, he would procure its surrender the in-

stant he appeared before the gates. It was known to be garrisoned chiefly by German mercenaries, without any commander of name, and crowded with panic-stricken fugitives; and the French commanders gave implicit faith to the assurances of their subtle ally, although he refused to reveal on what he founded his expectations.

The army advanced without the least sign of resistance, and descending the mountains which overlook the plain of the Volturno, Capua appeared, nestling amidst its towers and battlements at the base of its lofty hills. Around it bloomed the paradise of Italy—the Felix Campania—that ever, like a beautiful and lascivious coquette, displays her profusion of charms to every comer, welcoming all alike to an undistinguishing embrace. Vineyards clustered along every steep; groves of oranges, citrons, and pomegranates, perfumed the air; the glossy green of the pastures was so thickly strewn with flowers that they seemed like waste gardens tended only by the genii of the air, while in the vast concave of sky the cone of Vesuvius was plainly visible, and the rainbow-tinted waves of the Mediterranean.

Agreeably to his declarations, Cæsar and the Italians headed the approach to the city, to obtain its surrender rather than with intent to comply with the custom of war in summoning a city before beleaguering it. Accompanied by a large retinue of the chief commanders, among whom were the three competitors, who beheld the peaceful surrender of the city with dissatisfaction, Cæsar advanced, preceded by a

herald in white. The road was skirted on both sides by woods of orange and lime trees in full blossom, which opened at last into the rich meadows and gardens immediately surrounding the walls. Violets and jessamine bloomed even in the ditches beneath the bulwarks, and all looked so tranquil and unwarlike that it was a kind of surprise to behold the walls crowded with armed men, petards and culverins leveled, and men-at-arms standing beside them with flaming matchlocks. But the surprise was still greater, when in answer to the herald's summons, an armed chieftain appeared over the gateway, who shouted, "Truce! let us hear my lord, the Duke of Romagna!" in the well-known voice of Fabrizio Colonna.

It was generally reported that the Colonnas were retreating with the army of King Frederic on Naples, and the presence of the redoubtable Fabrizio augured the failure of Cæsar's project. But without any outward sign of dismay he rode somewhat in advance of his companions, who halted, and summoned the city to surrender to its lawful suzerain, the pope.

"I marvel not at your demand, most courteous and gentle assassin, poisoner, fratricide, tyrant, and oppressor! since you deem you speak to your traitor, Philip Maas, and not to Fabrizio Colonna, who is in Capua, to hold it for his lord the King of Naples, against all the world, our holy father the pope, and the devil to boot!" shouted the Colonna. "Therefore, illustrious Borgia, I must needs deny you

lodging, but refreshments not, for here are these melons to appease the thirst of your hot ride to Capua!"

And so saying, the commander beckoned to some soldiers, who advanced with a large wicker basket, which they heaved over the walls to the feet of Cæsar's horse, where it opened, and six gory heads rolled out.

Even Cæsar slightly paled at the ghastly spectacle, and quieting his steed with difficulty, he gazed anxiously over those gory visages with their glassy eyes and clotted hair.

"Are they not all there, or dost thou seek for thy paramour's beardless cheeks among them, to kiss?" said Fabrizio, laughing bitterly. "Bide a few hours, and I will send her to thy tent from one of these petards, thanking thee very heartily, that by setting her on this last black treason, thou hast given me a pretence to wash out the stain from the name of Colonna in her degenerate blood!"

"Even as thou wilt; thou sendest her at least to the Turks' paradise, and Sultan Zem will be at the gates to welcome her!" retorted Cæsar. "Even as thou wilt. The world shall know by the little moan I make how false are thy accusations."

"Dog! when she threatens me with thy vengeance —and thine alone, as her most doting paramour—if I tear her from the sanctuary! which by all the saints I will, if the baldpates yield her not ere sunset!" shouted the Colonna.

"Thus then will I refute thee," returned Cæsar. "The sanctuary is in the cathedral, and the cathedral

in the heart of this Capua, which I devote to the rudest wrath of the soldier, swearing I will never listen to any terms for its redemption! And as the lieutenant of the church, I withdraw all right or privilege of sanctuary from any church or chapelry in its walls, curse, ban, and excommunicate the whole city, and all holding it against our lord the pope! And, therefore, go now and do thy worst against the traitress and pagan harlot, thy kinswoman, of whom you accuse me that Italy may believe your lie of the death of Sultan Zem."

"Thou hast till this matchlock half wastes itself, and then our ordnance clears the air of thy pestilent presence!" returned Fabrizio, snatching a string of flaming tow from one of the soldiers. Laughing scornfully and shaking his clenched hand in defiance, Cæsar yet felt the necessity of retreat, and rode slowly back to his company.

"The tow is spent—discharge culverins!" thundered the Colonna, yielding to a fury which overcame every other consideration, and throwing it impatiently over the ramparts. All the summoners hastily retired, excepting Sir Reginald. "One stroke for merry England!" he exclaimed, and spurring his warhorse into a gallop, he threw his spear like a gleam of lightning at the lofty battlements, and for some moments only the flash of his sword, and his cheering shout, gave assurance that he survived amidst the whirlwind of smoke and fire around him. The emulation of the chivalry burst forth at the sight, and without waiting for counsel or command, an instant assault was resolved upon. The army came

rolling on in waves, the Swiss alone preserving their exact discipline, while the besieged poured a destructive storm of shot and arrows from every point of their lofty bulwarks, which were nearly doubled in height by the great depth of the ditches.

These obstacles were, however, overlooked in the first enthusiasm of the assault; some rushed at once headlong on their steeds into the ditches; others procured ladders and battering engines, and tumultuously endeavoured to scale the walls; and it was not until many had perished in the water, or fell transfixed with arrows, or crushed beneath huge stones, thrown with prodigious force from the walls, that the more sober began to misdoubt the success of the enterprize. But the French ordnance began now to thunder in reply to that of the enemy; and the clouds of smoke furnished some shelter under which the assailants advanced with their engines to a renewed attack. Rafts were hastily contrived to cross the ditch, and a crowd of the most courageous knights were waiting the completion of one to attempt the passage on foot, when general attention was excited by the appearance of a vast and ponderous machine, dragged by Cæsar's guard, under his own guidance. It was formed of four lofty timbers, moving on massive wheels, crossed with bars so as to make four steep ladders to the top, on which was a little tower with a drawbridge hung by chains, and ready to be lowered.

Even the defenders of the city paused and gazed in alarm and astonishment at this new and portentous engine, which was halted by command of the duke

out of the range of their artillery. The knights rushed around him in eager companies to ascertain the purpose of the contrivance.

"Niccolò of Florence invented it," replied Cæsar, laughing at their eagerness. "'Tis meant for cities like this, of lofty walls and broad ditches; but it needs perchance better men than we have among us to use it. Who will follow the three tourneyers—for I doubt not their readiness—into the castle above, whence to lower the drawbridge on the walls, and make us way to follow as fast as we can scramble up at their valorous tails!"

The boldest were silent at this proffer, until Sir Reginald, vaulting from his horse, and placing his foot on the first step of the ladder, shouted, "We of England have it!" and began to mount with great agility, despite the weight of his armour. The Orsino was instantly abreast with him, and Alfonso, amidst a general rush of the young French chivalry, managed to be the third.

In a few moments the castle was filled, and the ladders hung thick with eager combatants; and attended by a great throng of those who desired to share the glory, the machine was hurled along with such enthusiasm, and the ground descending rapidly, gave it so fearful an impetus, that it was impossible to hinder it from toppling over into the ditch. It fell with a tremendous crash forward against the walls, and in such a manner that the castle lay almost sidewise on the summit. Cæsar uttered a cry, which like the hyena's partook in some strange manner of laughter; but perhaps more

fortunately for the adventurous assailants than he had intended, so great was the consternation of the besieged, that they gazed without stirring at the formidable engine, and in that moment's pause the knights broke their way out of their wooden prison, and with cries of victory rushed to the attack of the bulwarks of a gateway before them, at which they hoped to admit their friends.

The conflict was now renewed on all sides, amidst deafening uproar, ordnance, shouts, groans, and trumpet-blasts, making up one hideous noise. Cæsar had at least the military virtues, and he was observed amidst all the destruction and tumult around re-animating his soldiery, and assisting with his own hands in making a kind of bridge with ladders and planks to the catapult in the ditch, that they might mount to the assistance of the victorious assailants above. The latter seemed indeed as if they scarcely needed any; the defenders of the wall were driven with terrific violence into a tower which crossed it, and defended the gateway below. But Fabrizio Colonna had now rushed to the point of attack, and displayed all the courage and skill of an able commander. Some of his soldiers were observed engaged in lowering a massive bartizan over the entrance of the tower, which Fabrizio obstinately defended against all the assaults of the half-frenzied victors, who clashed against one another in their furious attempts to be the first that forced a way into it. The Hospitaller and the Orsino suddenly met in a rude shock which threw them both aside, and allowed Sir Reginald to dash between them to the assault.

Armed only with a broken sword, and unconscious in the absorption of the conflict that it was so, the valiant knight rushed on; and although nearly all his mantle and surcoat was torn away by the spears which pierced them, he forced his way into the tower! But simultaneously a phalanx of pikemen, rushing from the opposite tower, came full flood upon the assailants behind, the chains of the bartizan were cut, and it fell with a deafening clash over the entrance, crushing the Hospitaller's axe from his hand, and narrowly missing his skull.

Le Beaufort remained among the crowd of his infuriate enemies within, and his friends without were now compelled to turn to defend themselves against the new assault. But while arraying their ranks in confusion against the spearmen, the battlements of the tower above were crowded with the besieged, a bright blaze arose, and suddenly a torrent of flaming pitch rushed down on the devoted heads of the assailants. Bathed in liquid flame a part of the combatants rushed distractedly forward, and many were hurled from the ramparts into the ditch, where they were suffocated by the weight of their own armour, without resistance. But the main chivalry rallied, and met the shock of the Capuan spearmen with undaunted courage; and a terrific pell-mell conflict followed on the ramparts, which the multitudes below could do little more than accompany with deafening shouts and uproar.

In the midst of all this horror and confusion, the crown was put upon the terrors of the scene, and all hope of assistance cut off apparently from the assail-

ants. The ditch around their machine suddenly blazed forth like a raging torrent of fire, and its waters covered rapidly with flames, as if impregnated with turpentine, sulphur, and other inflammable materials. The cry arose that the whole circuit of the walls was similarly prepared, and in universal panic the soldiery fled out of the ditches, abandoning all their engines, ladders, and weapons. The assailants on the walls, hearing the cries and trumpets of recall, beholding their desertion, and pushed by powerful masses of the besieged, abandoned all hope but that of effecting their escape; and although Cæsar's machine was on fire in the ditch below, the knights leaped upon it, clustering on the timbers like shipwrecked sailors to a mast.

The fiery gulf below, however, offered no temptation to those who were lowest to descend farther; and Don Miguel, who rode near the duke, exclaimed in an undertone full of exultation, "They are all three secure, and Madonna Lucrezia can only blame herself!"

"Hist, Miguel! who is it lends his hand to draw the Hospitaller over in safety? Look, it averts all the strokes of men's swords!" exclaimed Cæsar, so suddenly and violently that the castellain was much alarmed; and his fears increased when he saw that the duke stared with his eyes expanded to double their usual size.

"I see one—Fabrizio Colonna, my lord!" said Migueloto.

"Fool! dost thou think mine eyes play me false? I note him well enough with his column-

crest!" returned Cæsar vehemently. "The Dark One!—and now he raises the castle!—nought of earthly strength might do it!"

"My lord! there are some score of them raising the timbers to hurl it over; they know not that it falls on its carriage either way," said the castellain; and, in truth, rending the skies with their shouts of victory, the defenders made one vast heave, and threw the ponderous machine over, anticipating the instant destruction of all upon it. For a moment the mighty timbers quivered in the air equally poised and upright—a terrific pause for all upon it—and then fell backward with such violence that nearly all upon it were thrown off, and several were crushed into horrid masses of blood and steel.

All farther exertions were confined to rescuing the soldiery from the flaming ditch, restoring order, and keeping up a continual cannonade to prevent a sally from the besieged. It was found impossible to extricate Cæsar's machine, which was now in a general blaze; but although a number of the soldiery were burned and maimed, the principal loss was found to have been sustained by the knights, and among them in Sir Reginald le Beaufort. His fate was not, indeed, known with certainty, but there seemed little reason to doubt it, surrounded as his friends had last seen him by the weapons of furious enemies. With all his bitter reasons of dislike, Alfonso felt the warmth of his old friendship return in the deep regret with which he remembered the brilliant qualities of the young knight, coupled with his woful catastrophe. And yet this generous feeling was strongly

chequered when, amidst the incoherent ravings of old Bampton, he heard him mutter against a woman whose treacherous lures had led his young master to his doom. But the Orsino's rage and sorrow amply shared those of the faithful attendant, and it was principally by his assurances of vengeance on the slayers that the old man's thoughts were turned from absolute despair.

No certainty could be obtained, for Fabrizio suffered no one to approach his walls under any pretext, effectually precluding any advantage which the besiegers might hope from the fears and mutinous spirit of the inhabitants and fugitives. During the week which was consumed in completely investing the city, the only sign of shaken resolution was, that no sallies were made to interrupt, which, in so enterprizing a commander, showed either a diffidence of his troops, or of those whom he must leave behind.

At length the investment was completed, and night and day the city was battered with the French artillery, in the use of which they were already better skilled than any other nation of Europe. It was soon remarked that the town gave but a faint reply; several breaches were made, and none of the usual attempts were observed to repair the damage. But having experienced the courage of the defenders, the besiegers continued to widen their breaches, unwilling to renew the attack until they could make it in force. On one occasion, however, all were amazed to behold the walls, as it were, completely deserted. But apprehending some stratagem, and unprepared with means to cross the ditch, which they were la-

bouring to drain by cutting a channel to the Volturno, the French commanders suffered no attempt to be made. On the evening of that day, Fabrizio Colonna made his appearance on the bastion which had been so obstinately assailed and defended, with a white scarf twisted round his truncheon. Observing the Knight of St. John, buried in gloomy thought, surveying the operations of the siege from his motionless charger, he beckoned specially to him, and in a broken voice intimated his desire that messengers should be sent to him to treat of a surrender.

Alfonso felt in his own warlike breast the anguish which wrung that of the Colonna on the words; and he replied with a courtesy and feeling which evidently struck Fabrizio, for he desired him to inform the French commanders that it would give him much satisfaction if he himself should be sent to treat of the terms of the surrender. It was with a singular and violent concussion of passions that, after this encouragement, Alfonso begged as a special favour, that he would inform him of the fate of the English knight.

"Bid Cæsar send for his body, if it would content his brotherly tenderness to send it to Lucrezia for interment in that flowery sepulchre which has received so many!" returned the chieftain, with a grim smile, and the words raised emotions so tumultuous in Alfonso's breast, that he did not venture to trust his voice with any reply.

The tidings of the surrender gave general satisfaction, the French being exceedingly desirous to hasten on, stimulated by fears lest the Spaniards, whose

conquests were very rapid, should reach the capital before them. The wisdom of the Knight of St. John had been equally experienced with his valour throughout the siege; and moreover, Cæsar added his special request to Fabrizio's to confer the office of negotiator on him; and, with a kindliness for which few gave him credit, he entreated the Hospitaller to procure the delivery of the body of Sir Reginald, that himself and the Orsino might render due honour to the valiant dead by interring it with military pomp, for which purpose they would accompany him to the gates with a bier, and a fitting funeral procession of those knights and chieftains who desired to pay a last respect to his noble dust. There was something in this intimation which vaguely troubled Alfonso, but it was not easy to make any objection, and finally a herald was despatched to the city with intelligence that the envoy was ready to wait upon its commanders. Fabrizio returned word that he would expect him on the following morning, and besiegers and besieged, by tacit agreement, desisted from their mutual annoyances.

The morning of the fatal day dawned over Capua with a sky of that pale lucid purple which gives so exquisite a tint to the landscapes of the south of Italy. While his attendants armed him, Alfonso stood at the entrance of his tent, and inhaled the fragrant freshness of the morning flowing over those flowery champaigns, which seemed to thank him with living and intelligent smiles for his purpose of preserving them from farther ravage.

The whole camp was early in motion, but it was

only by the generals that Alfonso's mission was favourably regarded. The fierce and brutal soldiery were enraged at being deprived of the bloody triumph and rewards they had promised themselves in the sack of the rich and crowded city; and perhaps their zeal to render honours to the corpse of the valiant English knight was quickened by an idea that, if he had lived, his impetuous courage would have won the city in a manner more to their liking. When the Hospitaller set forward on his mission he was followed at a short distance by a very gloomy procession, principally of retainers of the Borgia and Orsini, their banners hung with black velvet, trailing their spears reversed in the dust. The barefooted monks of a neighbouring monastery came with them, chaunting lugubrious psalms, with lighted tapers in their hands, which burned whitely in the glare of the sun. Then followed two heralds, with black crape over their gaudy surcoats, and William of Bampton leading his young master's warhorse, housed and plumed with black velvet, and in the pride of its gait contrasting strongly with the sullen gloom of the ancient squire. After the steed and his guide came the bier, formed by two young birch trees, matted together with cypress, and borne by the English archers, hanging their heads in grief, or raising them to glower with fierce and revengeful eyes at the city in which their lord had perished. Cæsar obtained that the whole array should be under arms to receive the corpse; and as the attention of the besieged was excited by the universal movement in the camp, it was not until this circumstance was explained, that

Alfonso, attended by a single squire, was admitted into the city.

A drawbridge was lowered to allow the entrance of the Hospitaller, and when he had passed through the gate, by every observance of war, it ought to have been raised after him. The monks themselves paused, but Cæsar pushed so rapidly forward with the bier-carriers, that he established himself upon it; and the huge German who commanded at the gate made no remonstrance. Meanwhile, Alfonso rode slowly up a street leading to the castle of Capua, and the acclamations of the people, and downcast looks of the soldiery on his way, might have convinced a less observant politician of the state of affairs in the beleaguered city.

He found the Colonna in a chamber of the castle, which overlooked the great square of Capua, and a part of the walls. He was seated in a projecting window, busied apparently in watching some operation either on the walls, or in the square below. So much was he engaged in this survey that the messenger was twice announced ere he seemed to take any notice, and the latter had time to observe what so forcibly drew his attention. Nearly opposite to this window arose the towers of the cathedral, the massive gates of which were closed, and the whole intermediate square was filled with a vast and silent multitude, awaiting, as it seemed, in mute suspense for some prodigious event.

"Knight of St. John," said the Colonna, turning with a start, and flapping the iron lattice to, "you have seen too much. But I trust in your nobleness!

—let us to our task—yet, but for this rebellious scum, and the intrigues of a devil in woman's form!—but it matters not: let us to our work."

Alfonso was much struck by the words, and what he had seen, but he made no farther allusion to them; for, compassionating the situation of the Colonna, he was anxious that he should at once accept the good terms which, if his situation were better known, might not again be offered to him. Fabrizio and his officers, indeed, made but little objection to any of the articles, which Cæsar himself had contributed to render unexpectedly mild and honourable; but the former added a stipulation with such earnestness, that it attracted the Hospitaller's misgivings. He required that any punishment which he might inflict on certain traitors, who were convicted of having held a correspondence with the enemy without, should not be considered as any infringement of the terms by which the enlargement of the prisoners on both sides was stipulated.

The impolicy and dishonour of this concession made Alfonso declare that it could not possibly be assented to by the French. "Then must they send again when I have done it, and it may be out of debate," said the chieftain, rising with sudden and angry vehemence. "Sir of St. John! I have found in you too knightly and noble a soul to deem that Fabrizio Colonna will not rather perish amid the ruins of all the earth, than surrender his brother's daughter to be the paramour of her villanous seducer! His brother's daughter!—a monstrous sorceress, who has seduced the people to revolt, corrupted the mercenaries with

her gold, and even now, though famishing of hunger in the sanctuary, spreads her poison everywhere!—with her prophecies and ravings has won the people to resolve to surrender their city, publishing forsooth, that nought earthly can resist the fortune of the second Cæsar. But I have fitted her!—my castle and its holders are faithful, and with its guns I can at least reduce the city to ashes—which I have sworn, unless they yield her up to a just doom, rather than suffer her to fall with the city again into her Borgia's foul embrace."

"Signor, this may not be!—and I did ever hear she was the paynim sultan's leman," said Alfonso.

"Then the Borgia shall the less reck when he sees her suffer the punishment due to her crime!" returned Fabrizio. "The monks ask only a fair pretext to yield her up, for they suffer her extremities by the watchfulness of my guard; and this I have found them in the ban which Cæsar hath delivered from his holy father, and which one of my prisoners, who hath an exceeding desire to be at liberty, and would have Capua taken only by the strong hand, confirms to them as the price of his redemption, deeming only that they are a sort of common and malignant traitors who have taken sanctuary from my vengeance; for against the fiend himself, were he guised as now in female garb, I doubt he could not be tempted by any bribe or fear to wag a finger, so besotted is he with young men's dreams. Hist, yonder he goes! Since you may not stipulate this matter with me, tarry here a short half hour, and it shall not need."

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Speaking thus, the Colonna impatiently dashed open the lattice, and glancing into the square beneath, Alfonso perceived a body of men-at-arms crossing it through the throngs, which gave a slow and murmuring passage, escorting a knightly figure in armour, but without any weapon, and with his arms folded, and bound in a scarf as a prisoner.

"Why, who is he?" exclaimed Alfonso, with a start of very doubtful emotion. "It cannot be—and yet it is!—certes, it is the Knight of the Sun!"

"Ha, ha! and unless the woman of the Borgias has tickled your gills too, laugh with me at my mockery of the Borgia's jealousy," said Fabrizio, laughing hoarsely. "I spared him whole and sound for the sake of his matchless valour, but the damsel may owe me a reprieve when they are mixing their poisons, for her own! Nay, as you doubt, come and be the first to welcome him back to his liberty!"

CHAPTER III.

THE STORMING OF CAPUA.

"Cry havoc! and let slip the dogs of war!"
SHAKSPERE.

MECHANICALLY complying, it was some time before Alfonso rallied sufficiently from his surprise to remember the precise errand on which they were going; and meanwhile they had reached the square, and were winding their way through the masses of the people. A low continuous murmur followed them, but the attention of the majority was fixed upon the proceedings at the cathedral, with some within whose massive portal Sir Reginald was at parley. He spoke, in consequence, so loudly that Alfonso distinctly heard him aver that the sanctuary might with a safe conscience surrender the traitors who had taken refuge in it, inasmuch as the whole city had been placed under an interdict by the lieutenant of the church, and all the rights and privileges of its holy places were withdrawn.

By the time Fabrizio and the envoy reached the steps of the portal, these assurances had produced

their effect, or at least the famished guardians of the sanctuary, which, although the populace would not suffer him to break into, Fabrizio had kept closely blockaded, pretended to recognise their efficacy. The bolts were withdrawn, and the portal, slowly swinging open, revealed two pale and trembling monks, very aged, and nearly spent with long fasting and fear. A vista of the cathedral appeared beyond, terminating in the high altar under an emblazoned window, within a square tomb-like recess in which sat a female figure, wrapped in a rich mantle, the hands clasped, the chin crouching on its knees, and the eyes gazing madly towards the intruders.

Le Beaufort stared in utter amazement; a low and melancholy murmur arose among the people; and the very pikemen appointed to seize the refugee were pausing in doubt and fear, when Fabrizio arrived.

"Ha, heartless quarry! have ye not heard the ban of your sacred Father in Rome?" shouted the Colonna. "On with me, and drag her out of her hole, or I will begin the desecration by braining him that refuses on the threshold!"

"A noble deed hast thou done, and a knightly, betraying a woman!" said Alfonso, pushing past Le Beaufort into the cathedral after the angry Colonna; but his heart smote him at the bewildered and indignant glance which Le Beaufort returned.

Fabrizio rushed up the aisle, and the monks followed him totteringly, and even the soldiers with

evident reluctance and fear; but Sir Reginald was removed at a signal from the Colonna, by his guard. Luckily the Hospitaller was there to moderate the first outbreak of the chieftain's fury, for he plucked him back as he was about to ascend the altar to seize the victim, who, with a wild shriek covered her ghastly visage in her lap.

"Seize her!—Oh, well mayst thou hide thy face, thou monstrous harlot! Thou plague-spot in my blood, which must be cut out, or it will infect it all!" shouted Fabrizio. "A hundred crowns to him who clutches the traitress first."

"My lord! remember it is your brother's blood that you would shed," exclaimed the Hospitaller.

"'Tis false! I will burn her for the witch and pagan harlot and false nun she hath been adjudged!" returned the Colonna, with frantic fury.

"Then by all the holiness that hovers in these sanctuaries, Colonna, if you grant me not the mercy of this wretched dame, I will forth and proclaim the weakness of your sway, and make no peace with you but such as destruction seals," said Alfonso; but the words shed no gleam of hope into the wretched fugitive. She raised her head, and stared wildly at the pleader, and despite the horror and anguish of her expression, Alfonso recognised the once brilliant Fairy Morgana.

"Nay, knight, plead not for me,—but least of all because of my father's blood in my veins, lest it boil and burst its conduits!" she exclaimed, with the calm of despair. "I ask no mercy, none, of thee, brother of Agapit Colonna! but a heavier

curse than Alexander's light on your heads, false monks, that have so vilely betrayed the sanctuary of your God!"

"Daughter, we were nigh starved to death in your cause, insomuch that we were compelled to eat of the consecrated bread," said one of the old monks.

"I spared your consciences—I partook not of it," returned Fiamma. "And therefore what ye have done, may the nations imitate; and your sanctuaries be indeed as powerless to save as the reeds in which the hare takes refuge!"

"The sanctuary is not violated, lady. The lieutenant of the church, Cæsar Borgia, has purposely banned the whole city, and disabled its sanctities, to prove that he is not thy seducer—that thou wert the paramour of Sultan Zem!" exclaimed Alfonso.

Starting up, and turning to the speaker with a glare of incredulity and horror, Fiamma seemed struck with his noble and austere countenance, for she exclaimed, "Can such as thou seemest lie like the basest churl, without a blush? And is not the death wherewith ye menace me sufficient for your vengeance? Hack me to pieces rather than use those words! But it is false, and thou art damned below even my place, to calumniate humanity more blackly than the fiends at the day of doom."

The monks tremulously asserted the truth of the statement, and observing the effect which it produced, Fabrizio reiterated it with a terrific oath; and then indeed did the countenance of Fiamma

express a passion more terrible than the immediate presence of the most direful death had excited. "Ye lie, ye lie; ye are all of a conspiracy!" she shrieked. "Give me but an hour, but a moment, to warn him of your cruelty; and if he tear not down your walls to rescue me, hell is as true as he were false!"

"Seize her, I say, ye dastard dogs!" shouted Fabrizio. "Yet, knight, some mercy I will grant her at thy prayer: the axe shall drink her blood, ere the flames devour her body, which the betrayer shall never again behold."

"Hold, hold, Colonna! unless thou wouldst do the very will of thy mortal foe,—for is it not most clear how he desires her destruction!" exclaimed the Hospitaller. "Perchance because that she is the confidant of his crimes—because that he is weary of her, or would remove a scandal from his path—be not beguiled, my lord, into playing your enemy's game."

Fabrizio himself looked staggered at this argument, but it excited the furious wrath of her whom it was meant to serve. "Again, and again, and again thou liest! Would I were a man, to battle thee on it," she cried aloud in her mastering agony. "Thou art a man! Tell me, is man capable of such treachery? No, thou art a devil, and hast dreamed this on some burning pillow of anguish, and art sent hither that I may share thy hell in hearing it."

Even as Fiamma concluded this invective, suddenly as the bursting of a white squall at sea, arose

an uproar outside the cathedral, which rang through all its aisles. But it was no longer the murmurs of an excited populace; shrieks and yells, the rush of unnumbered feet, mingled with distant shouts and blasts of trumpets, resounded. Fabrizio's instant apprehension was, that the populace had broken into an open mutiny in defence of the sanctuary; and he made an irresolute gesture, as if to seize Fiamma with his own hands. Alfonso caught him by the arm, and suddenly darting from the shrine, the lady ran up the steps of the altar, and seizing one of the massive pieces of gold plate which were piled on it as a place of safety from every spoiler, she shrieked—"Rescue, rescue! he comes, he comes!" till all the aisles rang again.

Fabrizio turned slightly pale; and yells from without were now distinctly heard, which returned a fearful chorus to the words—"Treason, treason! Borgia, Borgia! Orso, Orso!—Vengeance and the bonny broom-flower!" were sounds distinguishable above all the uproar.

"False knight, hast thou betrayed me!" said the Colonna, turning furiously on the Hospitaller, with his hand on his dagger.

"Heaven so help me!—but harm not this guilty but more wretched woman," said Alfonso, placing himself resolutely between the kinsfolk.

"'Tis but a new freak of the mob!—I'll quiet them with some broken heads!—With me, knight! I need some gage of your faith!" said the Colonna, still more startled with the sounds distinguishable in the tumult. Alfonso willingly complied, and together

they rushed to the portals, before which the soldiery and mob were standing alike agape, while the battlements of the castle in front were covered with disordered masses of combatants, hurling one another frequently over, and ordnance was heard thundering at the gates which intervened to the street up which the knight had entered Capua.

Fabrizio turned, maddened with wrath at the treachery in which he imagined the envoy must have shared; and undoubtedly his vengeance would have been bitterly wreaked upon him, if, discerning at a glance what had happened, Alfonso had not with great presence of mind and promptitude retreated into the cathedral, and suddenly closed and bolted the strong gates of the sanctuary. Distracted on the other hand by the progress of the stormers, Fabrizio shouted to his soldiers to advance, and galloped recklessly through the crowd to the castle-gate. But even as he approached it was burst open, and a mass of cavalry and spearmen rolled in, with cries of "Kill, kill!" and the Colonna was surrounded by an infinite multitude of enemies. He was borne down by the pressure, and must in a few instants have been cut to pieces but for one of the assailants who covered him with his shield—and who was his own late prisoner, Sir Reginald Le Beaufort.

The great body of the victors swept on, putting all to the sword whom they encountered; and the crowds in the square, wedged in by their own multitude, were trampled and slaughtered in vain attempts at flight. Cæsar led on the havoc with unremitting fury, and the Orsini and the English archers, although

they had recovered their lord living and well, were still animated by a rage which seemed as if it could not satiate itself with destruction. That the city was seized by a treacherous surprise, Alfonso could not doubt; but he could only conjecture the result of the struggle within the barred gates of the sanctuary, which the affrighted monks now trebly secured—uncertain indeed from which side he himself might have most to apprehend. The rush and roar without, the shrieks and yells far and near, the terrific violence with which masses of the populace were ever and anon driven against the ponderous portals, the hellish hack and trample which were audible amidst the hurl of their flight, the cries of triumph, principally in French—soon gave tokens that the assailants were the victors. This was confirmed in a few minutes, when terrific blows of axes and spears were heard at the gates of the cathedral, and the voice of Cæsar reached Alfonso's ears, shouting "No sanctuary! no quarter!"

Fiamma—who still stood on the altar, grasping the massive ornament she had seized, her nostrils and eyes dilated, and her black hair disordered like those of a frightened steed—distinguished the voice even at the distance, and with a delirious shriek of joy made the cathedral ring with her cries of "Rescue! I am here! Cæsar, rescue!"

"Ho, without!—none are within here but Fiamma and myself, the Knight of St. John!" echoed Alfonso, thundering with the hilt of his sword at the gate so as for a moment to enforce audience.

"Burst open the gates! slay all whom ye meet!"

Cæsar was heard to yell. "Slay all! all! death to the sorceress!—'tis religion to slay her!"

Fiamma heard not these words in the frantic cries with which she endeavoured to attract, as she imagined, the assistance of the friends whom she had so signally served; and for an instant Alfonso himself could not but believe that the tale of her love with Cæsar was unfounded. But as rapidly recalling all circumstances, and moreover hearing the peremptory orders to spare none within the sanctuary, indignation and wrath kindled in his soul almost to frenzy. He doubted not that there would be those among the assailants who would recognise himself and secure his own protection, but he determined also to preserve Fiamma at every risk. Leaving the doors to resist with their strength against the redoubled violence of the assailants, he rushed back to the altar; but as he approached, Fiamma raised one of the massive pieces of plate, and shrieked aloud that if he advanced any nearer she would hurl it at him.

"I would protect you, lady! or you are but lost; I heard Cæsar command these stormers to slay you as a witch and pagan paramour," replied Alfonso.

"Thou liest, recreant traitor! Cæsar has hazarded all to save me—I am saved!" she returned. "Help, my Cæsar! save thy Fiamma!"

Almost on the words the gates of the cathedral gave way with one terrific crash, and a horseman dashed forward, flourishing his falchion, striking innumerable sparks of fire from the once sacred pave-

ment, and hounding on the rush of the spearmen who followed him. In a moment the cathedral was flooded with a tumultuous cataract of fugitives and of the merciless soldiery, some yelling for mercy and prostrating themselves beneath the relentless hoofs, others madly resisting and grappling with the steeds as their slayers hacked them down.

The foremost horseman halted, urging on the rest as a huntsman cheers the pack; but Fiamma, recognising him, attempted to rush down from the altar, exclaiming with frantic joy "Cæsar! my Cæsar! I am here," while Alfonso dashed forward, and seized her with such violence that she could not advance.

"What woman is this that yclepes us as familiarly as her dog?" said Cæsar. "Castellain, dost thou know her?"

"Horror and anguish, I know, have changed me! But, Cæsar, dost *thou* not know me?" said Fiamma, with an agony in her shrieking tones which pierced above all the uproar of human anguish around.

"Yea, forsooth! thou art my wife, harlot! art thou not? the castellain of Santangelo's wife? I am thy jest, thy wittol, the laughter of the carnival!" returned Migueloto, lashing himself into the fury necessary to stifle even in his breast the horror of the cruelty he meditated. Then raising his bloody axe he spurred his horse so furiously that it actually darted up the steps of the altar; but he reached not sufficiently near the victim to accomplish his murderous purpose, for the Hospitaller met him half-

way, and dashing his shield on the charger's head, hurled both steed and rider over on the pavement below.

"Mark ye all, by this, the damsel is mine!" shouted the knight, clutching Fiamma by one arm, and pointing with his naked sword to the prostrate castellain. "Take what share of the plunder else ye will, but this is mine!—Lady, come with me, or you are but lost! Soldiers, ye know me, the Knight of St. John!"

But despite this appeal, and his well-known strength and courage, it was, perhaps, as well for him that at this instant Le Beaufort, the Orsino, and several French knights, galloped into the cathedral, shouting "Sanctuary! sanctuary! rescue the dame!"

The cry suspended for a moment the horrible destruction which raged around, and which had already covered the shrines with blood and brains, and the pavement with mangled carcasses.

"The Knight of St. John!—alive and well!—whom we have all gone raging mad to avenge," said Cæsar, instantly. "Now indeed is our glory and victory without a cloud, and I forgive Sir Reginald for snatching Fabrizio from his just doom of traitor and parricide."

"Bear all the glory then, Cæsar! hell only will dispute it with thee!" returned the Hospitaller. "The only share that I demand in the treacherous success shall be—this fair paramour of Sultan Zem."

"What, the holy knight! the Knight of St. John!

the woman-hater!" exclaimed Cæsar, laughing with mingled fury and derision until the lofty roof re-echoed.

"It is most just and rightful,—she is the prize of the Knight of St. John," shouted the Orsini. "Lady, exult in your triumph, which achieves what all our Roman beauties might not."

"Take me from this man's clutch, Cæsar!—Cæsar, what means this?" shrieked Fiamma.

"I mean you nought but honour and safety, lady; or may these holy roofs crumble in upon me," said the Hospitaller. "I swear that I will lead you in all honour and safety to the presence and protection of Fabrizio Colonna, if he be in French keeping."

But the words seemed only to increase Fiamma's terror, and she threw herself distractedly on her knees almost beneath the hoofs of Cæsar's rearing steed.

"In very truth, fair dame, this fancy for us is as sudden as any we have yet encountered, but we may not take thee from him whose pretty prize thou art—the holy knight!—in whose good word, good faith, thou mayst confide," said Cæsar, still laughing direfully. "Or if thou fearest, here is my dagger!" And he mockingly extended the hilt of a sharp and bloody weapon to his suppliant. But, perhaps to his surprise, she darted up, clutched it, and holding it high in the air over her head—"Speak, fathomless traitor!" she shrieked, watching his eye like a tigress expecting the spring of the panther. "Never until now—because I would owe nought but to thy love—thy love!—have I warned thee that thy sorcerer, Sabbat, predicted that thou shouldst some day

owe thy life to me, or lose it! Speak, shall I strike into this heart, since thine is harder than the steel which sheathes it?"

"She raves!—famine and fear have left her witless," said Cæsar, but not without visible trouble. "Yet it is fit that we should remember she did us some service in this great triumph. Migueloto, remove her to the castle with the rest of the female prisoners."

"None but myself shall be her escort," shouted the Hospitaller, as Migueloto staggered giddily forward; and the knights, above all the Orsino and Sir Reginald, in a general uproar of laughter and oaths supported his claim. Cæsar yielded, apparently without difficulty; and half unconsciously Fiamma suffered the Hospitaller to draw her away with him, keeping her head still turned, and her eyes fixed on Cæsar with a glare of stupefaction, until she was out of the cathedral.

The castle of Capua was in possession of the conquerors; from its highest towers waved the French lilies glistering playfully in their azure field in the meridian light of the sun. To reach the gates, it was necessary to cross the great square, and never did war, when at his bloodiest work, present a more ghastly scene. The whole space was strewed with indistinguishable heaps of the slain, men, women, and children, and horses, butchered, trampled, brained, in all the most hideous forms of destruction. No signs of resistance appeared, and the work of plunder and lust had succeeded to that of slaughter. The square

seemed covered with the wreck of some great earthquake, so strange and disordered was the ruin scattered over it. Rich furniture, jewels, chests of plate, bales of silk, and the commonest utensils of daily life, lay heaped around; the houses on all sides were broken into, and some were in flames; costly articles were continually thrown from the windows, amidst hideous laughter and hoarse shouts of joy and triumph. In each abode a separate tragedy was enacting; from each came forth dire shrieks of agony and despair mingled in one wild uproar with the yells of the victors. Women of the highest quality, and richly garbed, struggled in the arms of the basest marauders, while some eluded the horrors of the fate of their companions by throwing themselves from the parapets of the houses. Palaces and churches were alike violated; nothing was sacred; nuns vainly shrieked for aid to the heaven to which they were devoted. The ban of excommunication pronounced on the city removed the only restraint on the passions of the demoniac soldiery, and prodigies of lust and murder were enacted on every hand.

Glancing down a street which led to the walls, Alfonso perceived the gateway at the end wrapt in a blaze, and as the thick oak burned off, there remained a species of iron network, the skeleton of a portcullis, through which, amidst whirlwinds of flaming smoke, appeared a multitude raging to enter the devoted city on this side also. A crowd of fugitives were pouring down a steep hill which led to the river Volturno, in the hope of saving themselves in some of

the galleys whose gilded prows were visible; but the opposite bank was lined with archers, who kept up an incessant shower of arrows on all who appeared.

The unbounded horrors of the scene appalled even the fierce and anguish-struck soul of Fiamma, and she passively obeyed all the directions of her protector. To increase her terrors, as it would seem, they had scarcely entered the castle when direful yells resounded from without of "Kill all! no prisoners! kill all!" which were echoed from various halls and chambers of the fortress, crowded, as Alfonso now perceived, with Vitelli and Borgian soldiery. His first intention had been to lead his prisoner to the presence of the French generals, who were in the keep, and demand protection for her; but hearing these bloodthirsty cries thus echoed, and the despairing reiteration of Fiamma, "Not to him—not to Fabrizio!" and remembering, at the instant, the isolated tower to which he had been conveyed when he commenced the unfortunate negotiation with Fabrizio, he pushed open a narrow doorway which he also recollected he had entered, secured it after him, and dragged rather than led Fiamma with him to the lofty chamber above. The tower was used only as a post of observation, and, if at all visited, had been evacuated by the assailants, so that he encountered no obstacle in his design. But the yells and shouts still continued, and finding the chamber deserted, and almost certain that some violent attempt would be made to seize or destroy Fiamma, he barred the doors with all their fastenings ere he endeavoured to restore her scattered senses. But when he turned,

he was horrorstruck to behold her crouched in a corner, with the dagger in her hand, watching his movements with a glare of mad defiance. "Devil though he be, I am his!—his I will die!" she kept repeating scarcely above her breath. And when the Hospitaller, in the most gentle and respectful manner approached her, and with assurances of the danger which he apprehended in a tumult doubtless raised by Cæsar to destroy them both, she suddenly darted at him, and struck so powerful a blow on his breast with the weapon, that his armour of proof scarcely turned the edge, and the blade shivered in pieces. But this effort exhausted her remaining strength, and she sank senseless as one dead at the feet of the knight.

To apply for any assistance or restorative was hopeless, and the uproar was now mingled with shrieks, probably from victims of the renewed massacre. But most fortunately, Alfonso found a half-emptied goblet of wine which he remembered Fabrizio had offered to him when he arrived. And beautiful, albeit so ghastly, as she was, never did mother tend her sick infant with purer or gentler anxiety than the chivalrous Hospitaller his young captive.

She revived at length, raised herself with a convulsive effort, and glared around, while Alfonso endeavoured by protestations and entreaties to soothe her perturbed imagination. But it was long ere his respectful demeanour, conjoined with the conviction that she was utterly at his mercy, infused some belief in his words. Memory returned, and its progress

seemed marked by the succession of shrieks which she uttered; and when from her wild rhapsody Alfonso comprehended all her devotion to the pitiless betrayer, and sufferings in his behalf; to what hazards she had exposed her life in corrupting the mercenaries in Capua; that, even when starving in the sanctuary, it was she who had gained over the German ritter who had admitted his legions; he himself could scarcely believe in such perfidy. His indignation at the treacherous advantage which Cæsar had taken of his negotiation was now deepened by the certainty he acquired that he had assented to it only to render his blow more certain and unexpected. But suddenly the torrent of recollections and ravings met in a direful shock in Fiamma's mind, and with a frantic peal of laughter, she exclaimed, "I see it all!—he yielded me to thee—to thee, the contemner of Lucrezia Borgia! And this is part of his plan to break her heart, and rid him of all fear of any suitor favoured by herself! But not the less will he slay thee, and both of us. Oh, foil this black perfection of his cruelty!—Leave me to my fate!—in mercy, leave me!"

Not without a hope to obtain some revelation from one who was probably so well acquainted with the secrets of the Borgias, Alfonso declared the futility of this argument by darkly hinting at the reports of the co-partnership in guilt between Lucrezia and her brother. Fiamma replied by a raving and yet sufficiently intelligible account of Cæsar's project avowed to herself, which entirely refuted the charge, and agitated Alfonso with an emotion which all the riot and tumult

that still raged had not stirred in his heart. But again he answered with the bitter rejoinder which his jealousy of Le Beaufort suggested, that Cæsar must now be aware that he was superseded in Lucrezia's favour, if ever indeed he had obtained a place in it, by the famous English knight. Still more wildly Fiamma declared that he founded the suspicion on a treacherous assistance she had herself afforded to Cæsar in the carnival, when she enacted the fairy Morgana, and persuaded whom he directed by her artifices that she was Lucrezia. But still he reiterated his accusation against Cæsar, and when, in her desperation at the thought, she endeavoured some refutation by furiously accusing him of the object of his embassy from Ferrara—to rake up calumnies against the whole Borgian name—he replied by detailing in what manner Cæsar had learned the fact. He related the adventure of the valley of Egeria.

The suspicions which it is probable had long lurked in the heart of the miserable victim, direfully echoed these statements, which the heroic honour of the Knight of St. John's character confirmed. But yet she would not believe the inferences which he drew from all he had witnessed, and raved in her efforts to refute them, unheeding the dangers and horrors which seemed thickening around. But the Hospitaller meanwhile was aware that the uproar was subsiding, at least in the fortress; and he purposely prolonged and embittered the discussion to prevent Fiamma from yielding to the exhaustion which only the violence of passion for awhile had baffled. But in this frenzied dialogue, darkness came

on, and she began now to rave in her entreaties that he would leave her, permit her to depart, to yield herself up to Cæsar's vengeance, and thus avert it from him; and Alfonso was deeply affected with her passionate declaration, that she had but one wish or hope left—to die by her betrayer's hand.

Alfonso promised only that as soon as he was satisfied that the tumult was appeased, he would hasten to the French generals to obtain some safeguard for her; and he opened the lattice which overlooked the square to discern what had happened.

The bright sun of the Campagna Felice had set on a scene of destruction and anguish than which human sufferings have rarely offered a sight more terrible; and now the serene and starry heavens of its night overlooked a spectacle more direful, when the slaughterers, bathed in the gore of six thousand human beings, and weary of destruction, held an infernal feast of debauchery and drunkenness amid the weltering carcasses of the slain. Illumined by the glare of torches or of flaming barrels of pitch, the whole square seemed like a vast pandemonium, in which fiends in human shape executed the worst devices of a satanic dream. Death himself could no longer give a refuge from the lust and nameless cruelties of those hideous bands, among whom Cæsar's own troops, composed of the refuse of many nations, amazed even their bloody comrades with deeds of horror and rapine. The duke himself was apparently the centre and prime reveller of the direful feast. Alfonso discerned him seated among the piles of rich spoil, surrounded by some of his most ferocious

captains, quaffing huge draughts of wine, and laughing at the shrieks of a multitude of female captives, who were driven to his presence by the spears of his men-at-arms, with a number of male prisoners, torn from the places of concealment or refuge which they had hitherto found.

Himself and his direful company seemed engaged in scanning and selecting from these miserable groups, abandoning the great majority to the merciless soldiery and horrors unutterable.

"He looks for me among these groups—he thinks that thou hast perished in defending me.—Fabrizio too is dead for my crime, for these are the prisoners whom they have torn from the keep," said Fiamma, in a voice calm with despair. "Leave me, good knight! for thine own sake, for anon he will discover that I am not there, and he will slay us both."

"None shall harm thee, lady, while I have strength to lift my sword," said Alfonso. "But all seems quiet now in the citadel; and this isolated chamber is unsuspected, and the French, 'tis certain, have expelled the marauders. I will to Louis de la Tremouille to demand, and I doubt not, to obtain, protection for thee, if thou wilt draw the bolts after me, or canst, whose strength alone may defend thee during a longer delay than I purpose making."

Fiamma assented with wild eagerness to this plan of securing her safety, and although she could scarcely totter with weakness, she urged immediate action by complaining for the first time of the famine she had suffered. A few burning drops of anguish distilled from her eyes, and when the Hospitaller, with great

tenderness and compassion, soothed her with assurances of his immediate and safe return, and yet at the same time unsheathed his sword to protect him on his mission, the contrast quite overcame her.

"And must thou, too—thou, too—most generous and noble knight—be sacrificed to preserve a wretch unworthy to live, whose destruction the most compassionate angels will smile on!" she exclaimed. "Why shouldst thou aid a thing who would not aid herself—whose only hope and refuge are destruction? —Eternal, if it might be!—But, farewell! There is no eloquence in thanks to pay thee, since deeds were vain. Save me, if thou wilt and canst, to the miserable years of unpausing anguish which only can await me—and farewell once again!"

Much affected, and embracing her with brotherly delicacy and tenderness, not unmingled, perchance, with the warmth which beauty and the sense of protection inspire, Alfonso hastened on his mission, listening until he heard her draw the bolts within.

He found the passage in which the tower opened tenanted only by some carcasses wallowing in their own gore, and which he was not much surprised to observe wore the badge of Cæsar. A flight of stone steps, leading to the principal chambers of the castle, was strewed with similar carnage, denoting that a fierce conflict had taken place between the marauders and those who had defended the prisoners against their bloodthirsty design, among whom was an English archer of Le Beaufort's. The gate which admitted into the citadel on the summit of these stairs was massively barred and bolted; and it was

with great difficulty, by revealing who he was, that he obtained admission through the guard of Swiss who held the chamber within. Guided by one of these men he soon entered the presence of the French generals, who were partaking of a disordered banquet with such of the knights as abstained from the horrible sports abroad, and their captives, among whom was Fabrizio Colonna. Le Beaufort and the Orsino sat on each side of him; and to their valiant succour, Alfonso afterwards learned, the Colonna owed his rescue from Cæsar's marauders, who effected the recapture of nearly all the other prisoners.

Anxious to clear himself in the opinion of Fabrizio of any share in the treacherous surprise, the Hospitaller addressed the French commanders with vehemence, complaining of the share which would seem to be imputed to him in it, and imploring of them to put a stop to the slaughter.

"Cæsar hath all the glory or the shame of the deed, but war regards no treaties until the cross is kissed on them, and this bloody example shall spare the necessity of many more—therefore let the soldier rage his fill!" said La Tremouille. "Moreover, all order and obedience are lost, and to restrain them now were only to provoke a fiercer outbreak than this we have quelled, since the Duke himself hounds them on. But, knight, methinks thou hast the less reason to lament the chance, since they tell us the fairest spoil in Capua fell into your clutch."

"I have saved a damsel of high name from dishonour, monseigneur," said Alfonso with indignation; "and it is to obtain your protection for her

that I am chiefly here—whither, and to the noble Colonna, I would fain lead this hapless dame."

"Bring her to me! Send her to the stake, Frenchman! for a foul witch and traitress, or she will find some means to betray ye all!" said Fabrizio, furiously.

"Such protection as I can give, she shall receive, —bring her hither," said La Tremouille. "But if she be a damsel so light of love, I doubt me she will soon find a rival for your saintship in this presence."

"I at least shall not enter the lists, there, with the Knight of St. John," said the Orsino. "But shame on us, since we speak of one who bears, however unworthily, so noble a name."

"I will aid you to protect your prize, Knight of Ferrara, against the world," said Le Beaufort with generous warmth. "Or is she among yon forlorn crowd, and to be rescued? If so, though the retrieve be desperate, here is my sword with thine."

"It needs not. Let me have some food, for she is nigh famished, and a torch, and I will return anon," replied Alfonso; but Sir Reginald and several of the French knights declared they would accompany him, not without whispering licentious suspicions and conjectures, which he thought it best to refute by permitting their request.

Accordingly a considerable body went with him to the tower; and disregarding their significant glances, he led the way up to the isolated chamber, where he had left Fiamma. But his heart misgave him when ascending the steep winding steps he per-

ceived that the door was thrown widely open. He entered—waved the torch anxiously around into every gloom—but no Fiamma was visible; and the incredulous smiles of his companions convinced him that they imagined he was only deluding them with a fair show, when he led them to this spot. The Orsino even laughed aloud, when he hurried to the lattice, and looked down the great height into the square below, as if he expected to descry her mangled remains.

"Unless he has thrown her there himself!" he muttered to Sir Reginald.

And indeed, recollecting the unbarred door, the conviction rushed upon the Hospitaller that she had either left it open to delude him on the fearful nature of her suicide, or had ventured on one scarcely less terrible by descending among the diabolical revellers below. Research for her in either case must now be in vain, and would expose himself to probable destruction if Cæsar found him in his grasp, in a position in which he could sacrifice him without his own direct agency. But the disappointment and sorrow of the Hospitaller would not permit him altogether to abandon the search; and he spent the whole night alone, anxiously watching all that occurred in the square below, but without observing aught to calm or increase his apprehensions, until the gradual silence of the ruined city, the chill of the morning air, and his own exhaustion, plunged him in a broken and horror-haunted slumber.

CHAPTER IV.

" Have I not had my brain sear'd, my heart riven,
Hope sapp'd, name blighted, life's life lied away?
And only not to desperation driven,
Because not altogether of such clay
As rots into the souls of those whom I survey."
Childe Harold.

The second conquest of Naples was as rapid as the first, under Charles VIII.; and passing through town after town, which all surrendered alike at the first gleam of the French banners, Alfonso himself almost doubted he was in a dream when Naples capitulated, and he gazed over its glorious bay towards the blue rocks of Ischia, in which the unfortunate Frederic had taken his last refuge.

The French army pushed onward to take possession of the frontier assigned to them by the partition, in which the Borgias had artfully sown seeds of dissension which already began to germinate. Cæsar, with his auxiliaries, prepared to return to Rome, under pretext of completing the conquest of the cities claimed by the pontiff; and most graciously, and as the last essay in their chivalrous competition, Louis de la Tremouille conferred the

command of the preparations against Ischia on the three knights of the Quest of Arms, as they were now generally called.

All the Hospitaller's unwearied researches had failed to acquire any information on the fate of Fiamma; and the demeanour of Cæsar to himself went far to convince him that he was not left in equal ignorance. But it was impossible to refuse so honourable a charge, more especially as his competitors eagerly accepted it; and the strength of the sea fortress, and the desperation of its holders, rendered its siege likely to prove the most dangerous achievement of the war.

The good understanding between the barons and Cæsar had for some time apparently been restored; but the most discreet politicians of Italy, who were not in the secret, were amazed to hear how strangely the Borgia had suffered himself to be outwitted by the barons, when, shortly after his return to Rome, news arrived of the revolt of Arezzo against Florence, and of the march of nearly all their strong and warfleshed army into Tuscany, to support the insurrection, and restore the Medici. Cæsar meanwhile advanced with his own forces to the siege of Camerino, one of the cities reclaimed by the Holy See, in which even complete success would be of little weight against the enormous preponderance which the barons must acquire by the restoration of the Medici.

Meanwhile the war in Naples languished; negotiations commenced, and though the preparations for an eventual attack on Ischia continued, the Knights

of the Quest were compelled to remain inactive spectators. But absence did not diminish the effect which Lucrezia's charms had wrought, in spite of all his resistance, on Alfonso's heart. The voluptuous languor of the climate of Naples, which counsels the oblivion of all but love, insidiously aided the magic of the recollections which haunted him. Apprehensions of the projects and success of the Orsino contributed to his uneasiness, which was finally excited to the highest degree when it was known that Paolo had suddenly departed for Rome. Immediately afterwards the compact by which the unfortunate King of Naples resigned his crown was proclaimed, as if it had been purposely withheld hitherto; and the whole forces of the Orsino, whose command he had deputed to Sir Reginald Le Beaufort, retired so suddenly from the camp, and by night, towards Rome, that it rather resembled a flight than a triumphant return.

Disdaining to share this precipitation, though burning with at least equal desire to behold Lucrezia again, Alfonso went to Naples to take farewell of the French commanders, and resign his charge. It was there that he first learned the astonishing tidings which had doubtless caused the Orsino's hasty return.

The grand combination by which Cæsar projected to secure to himself a great acquisition to his dominions, to compel the pontiff and Lucrezia into his favourite measure of raising an independent army by heightening the fears and mistrust on both sides irreconcileably, he had accomplished triumphantly

in all its parts. The success of the barons in Tuscany persuaded them of his sincerity in offering to head them openly, even in defiance of the French. But to ensure success, he pretended that it was necessary the Duke of Urbino should assist with all his disposable force, and especially artillery, which his mechanical genius had brought to a degree of perfection as yet unknown. Guidobaldo fell into the snare, and while he emptied his states of his troops, and despatched them to attend Cæsar at Camerino, the latter's garrisons in Romagna concentrated, advanced on Urbino, and took possession of all the roads, passes, and fortresses on the frontier. At the same time Cæsar, turning aside on his way to Camerino with a select body of troops, suddenly invaded the defenceless territory of his ally with fire and sword. In two days, despite the attachment of the people to their ancient and generous lords, the whole of the rich and strong duchy was in Cæsar's grasp; Guidobaldo and his brother escaping with difficulty, in the disguise of peasants, to Venice. To complete the consternation of the confederates, Cæsar disavowed all participation in the revolt against Florence, and the French despatched a powerful body of troops to the assistance of the republic, who compelled the Vitelli to relinquish their conquests and retire from Tuscany. At the same time Alexander sent reinforcements to the siege of Camerino; and the barons, in the universal panic, not daring to offer any obstacles, its lord endeavoured to effect an accommodation with Cæsar. But the Borgia practised again the trick

he had learned at Capua, and during the lull of the proposals he ordered a sudden assault, by which he obtained possession of the city and of the persons of the Varani. These potent nobles he condemned as traitors, and ordered to be strangled without the least regard to their illustrious blood and rank.

This extraordinary success, the destruction of a faithful friend to Ferrara, and the sudden neighbourhood of so ambitious and unscrupulous a power, were events of too portentous a nature not to hasten all the resolutions of Alfonso. He departed immediately on his return to Rome—where he had been long and ardently expected.

After the departure of the knights and of the French army, the splendour and gaiety of the pontifical court was, of course, very much diminished. Not only were the chief of its brilliant revellers gone, but Lucrezia herself—the very sun of its delights—was clouded with a sadness which all the vivacity of her character and genius could not dispel. Among those who grieved at the departure of the chivalrous array, Messer Pietro Bembo was certainly not to be counted. The absence of all those splendid competitors was not unpleasing to him, and his conclusions on the character of Donna Lucrezia inspired the canon with hopes which he did not mention in his prayers. He redoubled the vigour of his attacks both in Latin and Italian verse; and Lucrezia, whose fine taste as a poetess, and vanity as a beautiful woman, were equally feasted by these elegant effusions, took pleasure in

encouraging, and not unfrequently in replying to them.

Meanwhile the interest attached to the dangers and glories of the absent knights was not altogether favourable to the canon's views; until the report of the storming of Capua arrived, mingled with strange rumours, which Cæsar amply confirmed on his return by the bitter jests with which he assailed Lucrezia and her ladies on their failure with the Knight of St. John, who had proved himself no saint by appropriating and concealing from all rivalry the fair paramour of Sultan Zem. Whether the canon found the deep melancholy into which Lucrezia fell on receiving this intelligence more auspicious to the flame with which he declared himself consumed, he certainly did not inform the Hospitaller when he went to greet him on his arrival.

Messer Pietro bore the pontiff's command to Alfonso to wait upon him in person, as soon as he had taken some rest, and meanwhile to resume his apartment in the Vatican. But in spite of this apparently favourable sign, the knight's secret apprehensions were much increased when he found that Bembo, once so earnest an advocate for Lucrezia, had totally abandoned her cause, and declared that he was now convinced of her licentious attachment for young Le Beaufort—since she could not dissemble her delight on his return, even before the direful rivals who watched their meeting.

The triumph of the Borgias was complete, for now it appeared that the King of France had abandoned the Vicars of the Church to their spoliation and

vengeance, and the latest news announced that his heralds had publicly commanded the lords of Bologna to surrender that potent city to the renewed demands of the Borgias. The consternation struck into the confederacy was so great, that no murmur of resistance had been heard, but on the contrary, the barons unanimously tendered their forces to assist the duke in his enterprise. The canon was therefore earnestly of opinion, that to avoid a discovery, which was else inevitable and most perilous, the prince should quit Rome at once for Ferrara, without seeing either the pontiff or Lucrezia.

But the advice was not adopted by Alfonso, who declared with angry warmth that he would not condemn Lucrezia without proof; that he knew a plan by which to baffle any immediate danger arising from his supposed embassy, if it were indeed true that her feeling for the English knight passed mere coquetry; and that now, in his hour of triumph, the sincerity of the pontiff's professions was to be ascertained. The canon argued with great pertinacity, but Alfonso was not to be shaken from his resolution, and he hastened with all possible expedition to present himself at the palace.

His arrival was announced, and he was awaiting in his former magnificent apartment a summons to the pontiff's presence, when, to his great surprise, Alexander himself entered his chamber, accompanied only by the Datary. The eagerness of the pontiff was so great, that he merely spread his hands over the kneeling knight without uttering the usual benediction, and immediately began to speak on the

subject in his thoughts. "Now must the lords of Ferrara credit us, were they more difficult of faith than he who scarce believed with his hand in the wound of the lance!" he exclaimed. "Thou seest, son, how God has given us to defeat all the machinations of our enemies and rebels, whom we project to crush like glass beneath our sandals, aided by the good alliance we think to secure with Ferrara. We will speak so plainly now, that your lords may have no pretext to doubt. Approach us; and, Giovan-Battista, close all the doors, and be of our audience."

Alexander seated himself in one of the huge carved arm-chairs, and glanced around the magnificent decorations of the chamber with a darkening expression and a deep sigh. The bridal chamber of Lucrezia was also odious to the Hospitaller, and his empoisoned fancies suggested similar reasons for Alexander's evident distaste. Nevertheless, it was still kneeling that he awaited the pontiff's communication, who continued for some moments so lost in thought that he did not notice the attitude, and then with a gesture commanded him to rise.

"'Tis true you are the envoy of our vassal, but one whom we have it in our intent to make sovereign," he said. "The church may well pardon our memory bartering her shadowy dominion in Ferrara for the substantial sway we have restored her in so many lands and rich cities, and specially if the Holy See is indebted to Ferrara in the manner we design for the restoration of Bologna, usurped during so many ages. We desire to conceal nothing from your lords, and we own that unless our alliance with

them is concluded and thus firmly cemented,—even with the slippery aid of France,—the assemblage of an army of our barons, burning with their concealed hates and fears, were more dangerous to ourselves than to the usurpers of Bologna. On the other hand, to comply with our nephew of Romagna's passionately urged request, and raise an independent army to put into the hands of so young and ambitious a leader, were even as rash a venture as the Sun's when he gave his chariot to the guidance of Phaëton, (if Messer Bembo's legend lies not,) and scorched the earth with the fire that should but have warmed it. Yet I speak not these words in Italian rhetoric, but Spanish earnestness—for we mean our magniloquence —and would have the princes of Italy understand, that it is more to their advantage than that of our greatness, that we deny Cæsar the mighty instrument which he demands. Yet, again, unless this alliance is concluded, which would effectually overawe the barons, this I must consent to—since 'tis not to be dreamed that I will put myself into the power of the men who have blasphemously prated of degrading us from the seat we occupy, and setting up in our place our bitter and contumacious rebel, Julian della Rovere. Neither will our niece listen to the Orsino courtship, nor do we now desire to knit friendship so close with usurpers so insolent, whose destruction grows daily more just and necessary."

It may be imagined that Alfonso was thrown into great perplexity by this direct proffer, which also revealed so alarming a glimpse into Cæsar's policy.

" But, holy father, it becomes my master's dignity that I should first be assured he has no refusal to apprehend from the magnificent lady herself," he said, at last, placing some hope of extrication or delay in this manœuvre.

" Son, she hath submitted wholly to my will, and gave me her word to assure you, that whenever you make the public demand in your master Don Alfonso's name, she will return a public assent," said Alexander.

Alfonso was so completely taken by surprise in this announcement, that he knew not what to reply; and the pontiff, in his own eagerness overlooking the singularity of the silence, continued to discuss his projects with vehemence, which, coupled with the Datary's insinuations, convinced Alfonso that both entertained well-grounded apprehensions of Cæsar's designs, especially the latter, who trembled during the whole conference so visibly, that his sincerity could not be doubted, though he had formerly been one of Cæsar's creatures and instruments. The rich promises held out by the pontiff, relating to the dowry which he intended to bestow on Lucrezia, with the remission of the allegiance and tribute of Ferrara to the church, demonstrated his eagerness, but in nowise allured Alfonso; for the thought burned like vitriol on raw wounds in his soul, that Donna Lucrezia had either brought him into the dilemma to effect his destruction by the discovery of the futility of his pretended negotiation, or to compel him to save himself by a precipitate flight from

Rome, that she might be rid of his espionage, and abandon herself more unreservedly to her passion for Sir Reginald.

Luckily the pontiff was too much absorbed in his own thoughts and passions to observe those of the Hospitaller; and as if that were the only point in debate, he concluded the audience by desiring the knight to attend him to the presence of Donna Lucrezia, to receive a confirmation of her assent from her own lips. Alfonso began to perceive the full peril of the part he was playing, and to anticipate some sharp retaliation from Lucrezia. But it was impossible to refuse the offered honour, and with a strange mixture of emotions he found himself following the pontiff into the palace of his daughter on a business so opposed to his real purposes.

On entering the saloon in which Lucrezia sat, the knight was at first much relieved by perceiving that a numerous court was present. But the secret serpent stung into his bosom again when a glance showed him that Lucrezia was playing at chess with Sir Reginald, in a remote window too narrow to allow of any third. Le Beaufort's doting gaze was so fixed upon her that it seemed as if he could scarce notice what moves he made on the board; and Lucrezia was speaking to him in a laughingly triumphant tone as they entered, at the same time making an eager move to secure her advantage. This put her hand over to Sir Reginald's side of the board; and, if no one else, at least the Hospitaller observed that Le Beaufort, feigning to bend down to discern what had happened, pressed his lips to its

delicate whiteness with instantaneous but most passionate fervour. It was true that he turned pale, and that she drew her hand hastily away; but the next instant he beheld her press the mark to her own lips, and he distinctly heard the words uttered gently and tenderly, "False knight! it burns even my lips that would cool the smart!"

Indignation gave the Hospitaller firmness, and he stood coldly and haughtily before the lady as she rose to receive her sire, scarcely seeming to observe his presence. But when Alexander stepped aside, and revealed him with a smile, it is certain that tears gushed to her eyes, although she tacitly denied their presence by making no attempt to wipe the sparkling drops away. Some cold words of welcome she uttered, with an emphatic glance, as if explaining the circumstance, to Alexander, towards a group in a balcony on which the saloon opened, against the balustrade of which leaned the Duke of Romagna, looking into the apartment, but seemingly in a gay discourse with a crowd of ladies and young courtiers.

"Señor, we have not forgotten the somewhat austere and rebuking visage of the Knight of St. John," said Lucrezia, carelessly, as Alexander named him with great significance; and turning with an arch smile to Sir Reginald, she continued, "And now your friend the Orsino can have no apology to refrain from presenting himself before us, to hear the decision of our quest. Therefore we bid you summon him, and come yourself to-morrow, at our old evening hour, and according rather to the customs of

ancient chivalry than of those in our decaying times, give a true and unboasting account of your exploits; upon which we will deliver our judgment on some following day."

"Might it not please your grace to name the earliest, inasmuch as my longer tarriance in Rome is forbidden," said Alfonso.

"Why, then, the next be it," returned Lucrezia, turning away.

"Ha! thou wouldst lodge thy prey in security?" said Cæsar, who had joined the circle, in a tone of good-humoured raillery. "Dost fear, good knight, that having so long had the scandal I should project sharing the advantage, and rob you of your bright Capuan prize, the rich leman of Sultan Zem?"

"I fear your highness hath already wrought me as evil a turn," replied Alfonso, with stern serenity, and rejoicing in the opportunity to inflict the pang on the haughty lady of the Borgias which her reply betrayed—

"Nay, nay, my lord, we have too sharp experience of the Knight of St. John's—what is the word?—it matters not—the thought is on all your minds—to doubt him in this matter!" she said, with a singular gleam of disdain and suppressed anguish on her lips.

"Why, then, sir knight, if you will sell your prisoner, as the French have done theirs in the public market of Rome, I will bid you as fair a price as a Turk or an old cardinal," persisted Cæsar, laughingly.

"I sell not human blood!" returned Alfonso,

coldly. "Nor would I counsel any man—not even your *friend* the Orsino, knight of England!—unless his bosom be of congenial stuff, to harbour a serpent in it!"

"What means this Italian wit?—Alack, I have no skill in schoolmen's edge-tools, but I wear a soldier's!" said Le Beaufort, with extreme fierceness—but he met the glance of Lucrezia, and his high bearing suddenly drooped.

"Let us hope, at least, that into whatever hands the unhappy Colonna has fallen they are better than those she escaped from, whose license neither Turk nor—cardinal! said the duke that was one himself—could surpass!" said Lucrezia. "Let it suffice, we have declared our will, and with the sacred permission, Sir Reginald and I will conclude our interrupted game."

The Hospitaller soon retired from the tormenting spectacle of his rival's triumph; and on returning to his apartment he commanded Bembo to make every arrangement for their departure immediately after the ladies had pronounced their decision. In a very unusual manner the canon had kept away from the court; and he set about fulfilling these orders with an alacrity which surprised his lord, and convinced him that he should soon have no loophole of evasion.

While Bembo was engaged abroad and with great caution in making his arrangements, Alfonso passed several hours in a fretful fever of agitation. And it was drawing towards sunset, in the midst of his unpleasing reverie, when a page entered with a smile of

recondite meaning, and informed the religious knight that a damsel, closely veiled, who professed herself to be one whose honour and life he had saved at Capua, requested to be allowed an interview to offer her gratitude. Startled with the instantaneous recollection of Fiamma, Alfonso rebuked the page's leer with a stern glance, and an order to admit the visitant.

A female form, enveloped in a dark Venetian robe and mantle, glided in, and it scarcely needed the action with which she followed the disappearance of the page, revealing a visage whose fixed pallor, anguish, and resolvedness recalled that of the Destiny she had formerly enacted, to inform Alfonso that he beheld Fiamma Colonna.

"Lady! and do I indeed behold you on this side of human anguish? And have you ventured into Rome, into the capital of your enemies?" was Alfonso's astonished greeting.

"Nay, more!—into their castle, into their very arms!" replied Fiamma, bending her brow on her hands, and clenching them until the blood almost sprang from the tips of her fingers. "I am, as I was wont to be, the dismal queen of a sepulchre, of Adrian's tomb—a prisoner, but that I have means of evasion unknown to my jailers. Yet even he—even Cæsar Borgia!—might trust in the madness which conducted me to his feet that dreadful night—to know the worst, rather than to apprehend it!—to perish by his hand without leaving him the refuge of dreaming me debased by another! Pardon me, noble knight, my blood hath lost all its woman-tints,

else should I blush to say that even your generous honour might not have secured me from his suspicion. I chose rather to die—and dreamed that he relented when he concealed and spared me. Yet it was but to darken thy renown with Lucrezia, and assay her to the quick with the black calumny he hath breathed upon thy name!"

"It matters little; she is intent on other matters now," said Alfonso, bitterly.

"But there is vengeance—vengeance yet, for all!" said Fiamma, clenching her teeth with an instant but terrific expression. "No, not for all! He hath wronged me beyond all vengeance—but for thee!—Art thou still of the mood to acquire those certainties for thy lords, which 'tis affirmed thou art in Rome to win?"

"Yea, and at every risk," replied Alfonso.

"Why, then, thou mayst report that she loves!—loves where 'tis guilt to love!" said Fiamma. "What didst thou tell me, in mine agony, that the Penitentiary revealed to thee?"

"He who is now imprisoned in Santangelo?" replied Alfonso, evading a direct reply.

"Even he!—and treated with a marvellous severity, denied all visitation; confined in so deep and gloomy a dungeon that men marvel how—unless by supernatural illumination—he can read the books which monks tells us is of God, over which he is ever raptly poring! A strange, a marvellous man!" said Fiamma, with a slight shudder.

"Yea, a saint," returned Alfonso.

"Or a devil, permitted to wear the form to tempt

the whole race of mankind to a second fall worse than the first, denying that religion which redeemed them!" said Fiamma.

"Nay, that is woman's office, even from the beginning," replied Alfonso, with great bitterness.

"We wander—let us return to the matter," said the Colonna, hastily. "Lucrezia's confessor!—it is enough you understand wherefore I feigned an anguish which would it had indeed been remorse, that I might once again feel humanly, to win Migueloto's sufferance to speak with him. The murderous catalan hath a religion of his own, and even while he whets his knife for my throat in secret, would have me do what I may to rescue my condemned soul. I will not be tedious to tell you of all the bleak discourse we held, than which none direfuller is exchanged among the despairing ones in their halls of fire; and yet he could not fright me with all the terrors of his eloquence; wherefore I deem, that happen what will, fear cannot be among the sufferings in store for me! He won me to no quality of repentance, for my soul is exhausted now of all but the hope and purpose of vengeance; but I, with subtleties and dark suggestions of my wrongs, won from him confirmations, obscure but fiendish, of the thought which glows like a ball of fire in my brain, and will anon expand and fill all space with its hell! And yet something it seemed that this horror existed only in the intents of the dire criminals—might yet be baffled—but scarcely do I know how he subdued me into hazarding life on the merest die by procuring his secret egress from the castle, on

his simple pledge to return ere his departure could be noticed—but that I value it no more than gamesters the pawn they play in sport ere they stake their gold!"

"I guess the remainder—that he fled! But with what marvellous purpose did you suffer him to quit Santangelo?" exclaimed the Hospitaller, now much agitated.

"To seek out his penitent—to startle her from her guilty security—and with the terror of his denunciations, and such added majesty as his miraculous evasion might give, (and it was no less a miracle that it was wrought by human agency,) affright her—if not too late—from the black depths wherein she was sinking," replied Fiamma. "But that you may marvel the more, noble knight, know that the monk kept his word to the letter, and returned with no constraint but his own pledged word and confidence in his Master's promises, to his loathsome and most perilous dungeon."

"Marvellous indeed! But what befel him on his mission?" said Alfonso, breathlessly.

"I had learned for him that Lucrezia was in the valley of Egeria, whither she oft retires of late; and he found his time to speak to her alone," replied the Colonna. "Ay, in her terror and superstition she confessed that she loved!—loved with such madness that she knew no longer how to resist!—that her passion was full of guilt and despair!—and its strength may be argued when no extremity of terror or threat could wring from her the name of him whom she thus worshipped!—for the true instinct of love

taught her it was dangerous. Patience, good knight, for the monk, in his wrath at her contumacy, has promised to reveal to me the horrible intents and prodigious crimes of him whom the fiends also call Cæsar Borgia."

"Yea!—and by what necromancy?" exclaimed the Hospitaller. "But it needs none to reveal the beloved one's name—I swear it! 'tis Reginald Le Beaufort!"

"Necromancy!" repeated Fiamma, gazing with a startled expression at the knight. None but the dead, indeed, can reveal the full horror of the Borgia misdeeds! And if thou hast courage to endure the incalculable terror of such a presence—as I have!—thou too mayest acquire the certainty which it is thy dangerous errand here to obtain."

"As thou hast?—the presence of death!—certainty!" repeated Alfonso, shuddering, but not altogether incredulously; for the universal belief of the age was in accordance with the possibility and actual occurrence of such events.

"The friar hath his scruples—and I am bound by direful oaths," said Fiamma, brushing the death-like dew from her pale brow. "Neither, perchance, hast thou ever heard of his unearthly penitent, the magus, Dom Sabbat?"

"I heard great rewards proclaimed for him in the jubilee, by Cæsar's command," replied Alfonso.

"It was given out—to assist in the pageantries prepared—but in reality to conjure from them an unbidden guest; at least to compel it to some utter-

ance of its dread silence," said the Colonna. "To this intent, the penitentiary has for awhile withdrawn his prohibition; and to-night, if thou darest to share the hazard with me, in the catacombs, shall we behold the murderer in the presence of his victim, and hear him reveal the depths of his black soul in the horrors of his fear and deprecation!"

"May such things be?—Can the grave indeed be compelled to yield up its fearful habitants?" said Alfonso.

"If the spell fails, yet will the dark conscience which has already raised this thing work as powerfully as any sorcery," replied Fiamma. "And the conditions of the fiendish mass require a confession which shall teach other listeners than the demons the truth, even from those lips that least of all would utter it."

"Yet in the catacombs! So black a mystery to be enacted in so holy a scene!" said Alfonso, and yet without balancing in reality an instant to accept even so dangerous a means of relieving himself from his rack of uncertainty.

"The robbers and murderers of Rome, who make the catacombs their sanctuary, have banished all hallowedness from the precincts—the fiends stalk visually through the galleries, as of old angels wandered among the relics of the martyrs, graving their sufferings in the enduring rocks," replied Fiamma. "But even as thou wilt!—take time to deliberate, where I, who am a woman, paused not an instant! Thou art a valiant soldier, and I have cause to know it; but true it is, this is an enterprise

wherein thy tried steel can nothing avail thee, for if thou venturest, it must be in shadow and in secrecy! Resolve, knight, for I must return to my place of anguish, like a doomed ghost when light dawns over churchyard graves; but if thou darest this assay, which shall set thine and thy master's soul at rest for ever in certainties, speak, and I will meet thee at the gate of San Sebastian, guised as a mendicant friar, to guide thee to the place of rendezvous—an hour at least before midnight, for at midnight they meet in it."

Thus spurred on, and urged by the desire which consumed his soul, Alfonso solemnly pledged himself to run whatever risk might be incurred in the adventure, and to meet Fiamma at the spot and hour which she named. A glare rather than a smile of satisfaction lighted up her features; and with this compact they parted.

The hope that a full discovery of the crimes of Lucrezia would restore him to the peace of which he felt himself else for ever deprived, continued to support the Hospitaller against the thousand arguments and suggestions of danger which assailed him after the departure of Fiamma. With all her motives of vengeance, might she not still be the instrument of Cæsar, employed to entrap him to his destruction, which the evil reputation and desolation of the locality to which she invited him would facilitate? But Alfonso could not bring himself to believe in such monstrous ingratitude, and there is a magic in the tones of sincerity which involuntarily compels the human heart to trust.

CHAPTER V.

Iago. You would be satisfied ?
Othello. Would ? nay, I will.
Iago. And may : But, how ? how satisfied, my lord ?
Moor of Venice.

The agitation of the knight's thoughts consumed time almost imperceptibly, and night set in so darkly, that he made the necessary preparations for his adventure, concealing his armour and visage as much as possible in his long black mantle and hood. He had dismissed his esquires and the canon, and was preparing to quit his chamber, when a gentle rap at the door apprised him of a new visitor. He opened it, and by the light of a little silver lamp, which she was carefully shading, he beheld, to his surprise—Mona Faustina !

" My lord, pardon your poor servant !" exclaimed the old woman, entering rapidly, and speaking with great agitation from among the muffles of her toque. " My lord, I am a most miserable old fool, and I can call myself so from the day I was born ; for my fortune has been my bane, and to be the nurse of the

sweetest lady in Rome (whereof squires' wives had been proud, and I had nothing but my red cheeks at that time to recommend me).—But lose no time, my lord, and if you can, come and save her, or we are all lost, and the poor, handsome young knight of the far sea-land will run into perdition as sure as the Tarpeian rock! O, signor, he was your friend, whatever hath happed; and on my knees, and with these salt tears, I beseech you—save us all!"

"When I can understand a meaning in your plaints, mother, doubt not my will to serve you.—I pray you, give me a glimpse of your purport," said the Hospitaller.

"I dare not to my lord the duke; he kills *all but one*, and my heart aches with compassion for the poor young spendthrift, who thinks no more of a Venice ducat than another of a base half-florin!" continued the duenna. "Moreover, his grace bade me come to you in danger, in his absence; but the moon was not then at such a full. Woe is me, detestable old kite, that tear out my young one's bowels! Yet, if you cannot turn him back, I must lead him on, for never until now was she so bent to have her way; and they shall make fritters of me for the pope's 'lephant ere I will betray her to the duke; so come thy gait, for the love of all loveableness, cavalier, and you will find him on the terrace waiting me; and do thy best to turn him back, or indeed I cannot help myself, and he will come to as evil an end as a hornet in the bees' hive, for all it be among the honey."

"Whom—on the terrace—shall I find?" said Alfonso, with a deadly sickness at heart.

"It wants but a moment," returned Mona Faustina. "I have only a few minutes' grace, in my lady's impatience!—Sir Reginald! young Sir Reginald!—whom she has sent for under pretence to confer of the Orsini business in privacy—ay, in very troth, at this hour, and in her own proper chambers."

"Is it even so!—Why then, what is that to me?" said Alfonso, staggering as if he had just received a mortal blow. "Go on thy way, hoary pander! what is it to me?—I say again, and again, and again, what is it to me? Would it were rather a dagger cleaving my heart!—Hasten, fly, hag, and warn the duke. Let him avenge! He knows the style of old;—but begone for ever from my sight, loathsome old woman, whose gray hairs shall make age henceforth dishonourable."

"Nay, son!—that we should all go mad at one time," sobbed the duenna with evidently strong emotion, though perhaps not caused by the motive she alleged. "Then I must away and do my duty, for a man cannot serve two masters, nor a woman either, and Madama Lucrezia sucked at these breasts, unworthy as I am to say it; and blood is not water, and milk is more than blood, if you had ever had a sweet little nursling to know it!"

"Mona Faustina! stay—I will go; I will cross this villain's path to his guilty paradise," exclaimed Alfonso, after desperately permitting the old woman to reach the threshold at a very slow and wistful pace; and overtaking her with a couple of strides, he

added, "Lead on, but do not speak; I have no tongue to answer thee."

Faustina immediately led the way to the great hall which divided the part of the palace inhabited by Lucrezia from that tenanted by the successor of the Prince of Salerno. An open archway at one extremity admitted on a terrace, which being flanked by a high dead wall of the palace on one side, and a steep and lofty bank wooded with orange trees and myrtles on the other, was not much frequented by any of the denizens of the Vatican by day, and still less by night. Mona Faustina signified in a whisper that it was there she expected to find the young English knight, and cautioning the Hospitaller to make all haste in removing him from the dangerous locality, if possible, she retired on tiptoe with her lamp, leaving the Hospitaller to pursue his adventure alone and in darkness.

He hastened on to the archway, and looking with what eagerness may be imagined from its shadow, he quickly discerned the figure of a man wrapped in a cloak, seated on a balustrade at the end of the platform. His eyes were fixed with an intense glow of impatience on the rising moon, which was almost on a level with the sumptuous gardens below; and the fair visage, though flushed and deeply agitated, was that of Sir Reginald le Beaufort.

Alfonso quietly stepped forth, strode to the edge of the terrace; and after a momentary survey slowly paced up the platform, walking like a man in a reverie, and without seeming to notice Sir Reginald until he was close to him. Then stepping slightly

back, he looked at him with so rapid a scrutiny that although the knight plucked his plumed cap over his face he could not hope that he had escaped recognition. "Sir Reginald le Beaufort, can it be?" said the Hospitaller, without much apparent agitation. "I pray thee, our sometime brother-in-arms, art thou too lodged in the palace, or how chances it thou art here?"

"Signor!—but it seems you know me," replied Le Beaufort, after a moment's pause of confusion. "Nay, I deny not my name—nor my business either, sithence the damsels of this court are fair, and an ancient crone whispered me to be at my devotions to our Lady on this terrace at this hour, and if I prayed heartily I should hear good news. Matter enough to stir a young man's curiosity—but it fears me I should be alone."

The blood thronged so thickly about Alfonso's heart that he could scarcely breathe; the drops of agony poured from his brow, and he continued for some moments to gaze in silence on the quivering and flushed visage of the Knight of England.

"Harlot!" he muttered between his clenched teeth. "But no, no! Is it possible that the air of Italy can also corrupt natures like thine into treason so double-dyed! Reginald, it is not thus!—Lucrezia—Lucrezia!—it is to Lucrezia thou wendest?"

"Lucrezia!" repeated Sir Reginald, with certes a confessing paleness, and suffering his cloak to drop aside in his absorption, the richness and bridegroom splendour of his garb beneath was revealed. "Lucrezia!" he continued, rallying with mingled fierce-

ness and confusion. "And what if it be!—what if her grace give private audience to other secret envoys than those of Ferrara? Well thou wottest that all thy toil has been, and still is, to find matter to render thy hatred of this lady reasonable in men's sight; and yet thou treacherously feignest to be a secret emissary to promote the alliance, and thereby is the Orsino driven to distracted thoughts and plans. And though I hoped not so great an honour, nor do intend in other manner to reveal thee than by urging her to put thee to immediate assay—But how darest thou to arraign me, or my deeds? Let them be what they will, I am here to abide the consequence."

"The spell is heavy upon thee—the crimson and purple flowers amidst which the syren sings beside the rotten carcasses of her victims!" said Alfonso, wildly. "But thou shalt not listen to her voice, or thou art lost! Reginald, away with me!—we will leave this palace, Rome itself, together. There is no other refuge from the spells of the sorceress!"

"Not for all the realms which the sun set on to-night will I refuse the obedience due to my gracious lady's command," returned Le Beaufort. "I am a free knight of England, and have taken no wage of yours; therefore, exercise no mastery, for I own no vassalage."

"Certes, it is true!" said Alfonso, folding his arms and laughing with excess of bitterness. "And thus, at length, it befals that to thy friendship I owe that I have achieved the object of my journey, and can bear home to my sire a sufficient answer to all his importunities, unless he would have me seek a bride

in the sinks of his capital. Revel in thy Eden until she is weary of thee and gives thee to the knife, or her sire or her brother detect and spare her the pains!"

"Of what rave you, signor?" returned Le Beaufort, furious, he himself, perhaps, scarcely knew whether with the consciousness of his own guilt or innocence. "But if you accuse me for that—nay, I deny it not!—her grace is pleased to command my presence on matters relating to the Orsini; and I have obeyed, and will obey, though all the fiends and the swords of ten Alfonsos stood in my way!"

"Reginald! if it be possible that thou beguilest thyself with this specious saying, listen to me!—I tell thee the sorceress deceives thee into the betrayal of thy noble friend, of every faith of man," said Alfonso, panting for breath as he hurried on. "Thou knowest—thou canst not doubt—that she loves thee, at least as women of her matchless baseness love, more evanescently than the most vile and changeable of men. I tell thee it is not in humanity to resist, were it thrice subdued by years of fasting and solitude! Thou shalt not go! thou shalt not add to the heap of her most wretched and deluded victims."

"Lord of Ferrara! it might content you to rake amidst the slime of this foul city for matter to asperse this most beautiful and virtuous lady—but for my cause, while my hand can clutch the hilt of a sword thou shalt not!" exclaimed Sir Reginald, tremulous with rage and shame.

"Thou seest—I humbly hold my peace!—ay, the sword was given you to be her swashbuckler!" said

Alfonso, laughing and scoffingly filliping the hilt of the young knight's weapon.

"For this, among other matters, shalt thou abye a reckoning yet," said Sir Reginald, yielding to the passions of his fiery nature.

"Let it be now then, braggart boy!—or, softly, thou art not harnessed now for these rough wars! Go, bid Lucrezia arm her champion!" retorted the Hospitaller in a wild jeering tone. "Yet, stay! a safer vengeance may be thine! Go and tell her that the envoy of Ferrara, who rakes the mud of Tiber to bespatter her withal, is Alfonso the prince!"

"Ha, truly! I do detect thy craft! Thou art enamoured of the perfection thou hast failed to darken with eternal ignominy, and to keep an outward consistence wouldst have me betray thee to the Borgias that they may compel thee to marry their divine daughter!" said Le Beaufort, with a flame of jealousy bursting out in spite of all his efforts to conceal it. "Go to, go to! I am not the shallow fool thou wouldst find me; and I swear by the spurs I won in a bloody field I will rather kill thee than betray thee to such a doom!"

"Are life and death so absolutely in the hands of the mongrel Normans of beyond sea?" retorted Alfonso; adding with a convulsion that shook his whole stalwart frame, "But it is false! I loathe and spurn thy vile paramour worse than the vilest of the leprosy-tainted camps of France! And to prove it!—to-night—be safe! I leave thee to thy happiness, I will leave the Vatican itself; and will be as secret as its darkness, if—in some pause—thou wilt bid her give

thee the coronal of the tournament, that I may have a fair pretext to pluck thy heart out in some market-place! She will not deny thee so small a recompense as my disgrace and scorn; and if it be necessary to deceive the Orsino longer, thou canst sigh and swear by some pretty oath thou wouldst rather he had it than thy goodly self, an if thy merits might have suffered it."

"Not as hoping—believing—this, but in thy defiance, will I tarry here, and abide my fortune," returned Le Beaufort furiously, and clutching Alfonso by the mantle in his rage; but plucking it away with a violent gesture the Hospitaller stalked into the shadow of the arch, and almost instantly disappeared.

In the first tumult of his thoughts the Hospitaller himself scarcely knew how he left the precincts of the palace, or whither he was wending his way. The strife of a mortal conflict would have seemed to him a pleasant exchange; and in this mood, when he suddenly recollected his appointment with the Colonna, a kind of joy in the thought of its dangerous nature, and in the recollection that it promised him a full revelation of the crimes of Lucrezia, neutralized for some moments even the poison of that which he had just made.

The time was already advanced, and he hastened with all possible rapidity to the place of appointment, and at the gate of San Sebastian he encountered a figure which, though closely enveloped in the cowl and weeds of a monk, he knew by a signal to be Fiamma. They passed in silence through the gate,

and leaving the well-remembered Egerian valley to the left, proceeded with rapidity over the plain. The antique basilica of San Sebastian soon appeared in sight, whence the remote swell of triumphant anthems was fitfully audible on all the changes of the wind. But instead of taking the beaten path to the church, in which was the usual entrance to the catacombs, Fiamma turned off over a wild irregular heath, diversified with deep hollows and tall clumps of bramble and juniper bushes. Descending one of these little dells, which seemed as if excavated at some remote period in the sandy soil, they arrived in front of what appeared to be two or three grottoes hewn in the rock, half choked with weeds and fallen fragments.

Into one of these Fiamma glided with the easy velocity of a serpent accustomed to all the windings, but Alfonso involuntarily hesitated. The tales he had heard of the extent and intricacy of the catacombs, and of the dangerous personages who frequented them, forcibly occurred to him. But while he paused the clink of two flints was audible, and by the flashes which accompanied it he discerned that Fiamma was on her knees blowing some dry leaves into flame, and kindling a torch. Ashamed of his fears, and reanimated by the recollections which came upon him, he advanced into the grotto, and assisted to kindle the torch. When this was effected, in compliance with Fiamma's desire he drove a strong pointed stake with which she furnished him firmly into a cleft of the sand-rocks which walled the grotto. A circular groove was filed in the neck of the stake, and to this she now fastened the end of a ball of

twisted silk with such multiplied precautions as showed that it was a matter of importance. Fiamma then put the ball in his hand, and taking the torch, said with a melancholy smile, "And now, how beats thy heart? Darest thou follow me?"

"Ay, if it be over black adders!" returned the Hospitaller; and yet it must not be denied that when he perceived the intent of his guide, for another moment he hesitated again. He found that he was in a low cavern excavated in sand-rocks, with several arched passages branching off in various directions, into one of which Fiamma now led the way, with an emphatic caution to keep the clue in his hand, and unwind it as they proceeded. The torch but dubiously illumined the darkness into which they almost instantly passed, but the knight felt they were ascending by the slope of the ground against his feet. The passage was scarcely wide enough to permit an explorer to stretch his arms, and was unevenly walled on each side with chalk and sand. Proceeding in silence and with rapidity, the silk skein gradually sunk until it was on a level with the ground, and the Hospitaller found they were in another cavernous excavation, from which radiated three narrow galleries, one of which descended in an inclined plane of precipitous rapidity to a great depth, at times scarcely the height or breadth of a man, at others jagged like a fissure made by an earthquake, following the vein of the sand-beds. The Colonna spoke scarcely a word, but occasionally she held up the torch as she advanced, at times revealing dark openings where the gallery was crossed by other passages, but oftener some

ancient inscription, or rude bas-relief, depicting the sufferings of the Christian martyrs interred within niches in the walls.

The dense tomb-like scent of the air began to exercise a chilling influence on the Hospitaller; and the frequent crumbling of sand and rock on their way, awakening dismal and seemingly supernatural sounds in the remote echoes, as if the silent citizens of that vast necropolis complained of the profanation of their abodes by the presence of life; the labyrinthine confusion in which they seemed fast involving themselves; doubts of the purposes of his guide—continued to assail his spirit, and shake its natural firmness and courage. It may be imagined that he did not fail to observe Fiamma's direction in unwinding the clue, on which it seemed they depended more than on any knowledge of localities; and he found that it had little plummets of lead set at intervals to steady it on the ground. The necessity of this aid soon appeared still more strikingly, for the gallery, after descending to a great depth, began to wind as tortuously as if indeed traversing the bowels of the earth. The other inconveniences multiplied. Cold, damp, stinking blasts occasionally rushed past from the foul depths around; ever and anon pieces of the sandy rock detached themselves, as if some skeleton were pushing a way from his sealed niche, or some malicious demon attempted to crush the passenger; the spectral cries multiplied to an infinite distance, until they reverberated in faint and mysterious whispers.

Alfonso was beginning to be surprised and alarmed

at the great distance they had traversed in these galleries of death, when suddenly Fiamma paused, and turned with the full glare of her eyes and torch upon him.

"Your brow is damp, knight!" she said, almost with a tinge of contempt in her tone. "If your heart fails you, return; for we are now entering the place of ordeal, and you must remain alone and without light in these solitudes until the actors in the dismal pageantry arrive."

"Be the hazard what it may, I am here to run it," replied the knight. "I shall scarcely account any extremity to the flesh an evil which sets my soul at rest."

"Let us on, then—those words should have been mine," said Fiamma, continuing to advance, and the gallery gradually widened until it branched off on each side of an arch hewn in the rock, which opened into a cavern originally formed in excavating the sand from among the rocks, the capricious beds of which, hollowed out, had left a huge chaotic chamber, wherein immeasurable galleries opened as into a centre. Many traces of human art appeared in the carved walls, and inscriptions deeply cut in the rocks which ages had not obliterated. The natural pillars of sandstone, left by the excavators, were sometimes rudely wrought with architectural ornaments, and the dust which covered the ground was so white and deep that it seemed as if strewed for ghosts to glide noiselessly over it.

"Yet 'tis a fearful theatre—perchance to stage a more fearful drama!" said the Colonna, exhibiting

the interior of the cavern as far as her torch could illumine its vast recesses. "If legends lie not, the walls of these caverns sepulchre more dead than now breathe in Italy! Ay, and for the most part, murdered and mangled victims of the cruelty of man to man. This snowy dust is formed of their crumbled bones—these walls are crowded with their skeleton forms, which every falling splinter reveals to unhallowed gaze—for hither come sorcerers and witches to hold their black sabbaths, and delight their sovereign with the desecration of these holy solitudes. Hither will Cæsar come—a spirit as dark! But to see all unseen—hast thou the courage to ensconce thyself in yonder niche, over the arched entrance, whence thy retreat, guided by the ball in thy hand, is assured and easy?"

"It is very narrow—is it a sepulchre?" said the knight, with a shudder, and casting the light of the torch upwards to a narrow, but apparently deep dark opening in the pile of rocks over the entrance.

"What if it be?" returned Fiamma; "mark you not the half-effaced inscription: Nil miserius vita! What can we fear in death which existence suffers not?—But time shall not weary you much with his company until I return. Yonder passage leads, by a few windings, to the chapel where Cæsar and his sorcerer are to meet, the good monks believing them pilgrims, bound on a devotion to these shrines of martyrs—and they wait but the concerted signal from me."

"Time! wherefore should he enter these abodes of the dead?" said Alfonso, still hesitatingly.

"To bid them be patient!—fifteen centuries have elapsed since yonder martyr's tomb was carved with that word: Resurgam," said Fiamma. "How many cycles of ages must he yet await the all-awakening trump?"

"This immense silence perchance answers," said Alfonso, after a pause, for even his courage faltered at the thought of remaining alone in these fearful solitudes. But the violence of the feeling which now possessed him against Lucrezia revived his determination. It was easy to mount to the sepulchre by the juttings of excavated rock; and taking care to secure his ball of silk, after a short survey he prepared to ascend. But suddenly the apprehension of treachery rushed so forcibly into his mind, that he paused, and turned to Fiamma with a look which expressed his suspicions so clearly that she understood him without words.

"Betray thee! and wherefore?" she exclaimed impatiently. "Thou wilt deem it is little for one so condemned to imprecate,—yet may this whole mountain overhead fall in and crush me, consciously, throughout all eternity, if I mean thee aught but good!"

This dreadful imprecation silenced the Hospitaller's scruples, and he ascended to the shrine in which it seemed he was to take up his point of observation. It had, apparently, from its depth, been excavated to contain a long file of corpses, placed upright, as was the frequent practice; and from the richness of its outward decorations had probably tempted the cupidity of some adventurer

to break the marble closure away. If the sacrilege was rewarded with any spoil could not be guessed; but at all events nothing now remained but dust and darkness in the sepulchre, into which the knight entered backwards, for it would have been difficult to turn in so narrow a space, and he retreated some steps from the entrance, until Fiamma was satisfied that it was not possible to discern him from the floor of the cavern. Then waving her hand in farewell, with an expression of triumph kindling over her features, she hastened from the cavern by one of the galleries on the opposite side. Alfonso could not hinder himself from bending forward and watching the last glimmer up the gallery; then succeeded utter darkness, and a silence as unbroken as if sound was annihilated.

Thus abandoned to his meditations, his thoughts returned to muse with such anguish on the events transacting above ground that for some time he forgot his present situation, and the perils which might succeed in it. When at length the rapid shiftings of thought brought him back to this consciousness, he started, and almost imagined himself in some wild dream; but the pressure of his prison walls convinced him of the reality of his dangerous position. The absence of Fiamma was already long, and as it lengthened on, terrible anticipations and fears assailed his imagination. The proverbial treachery of the Borgias, the horrible vengeances to which they devoted their enemies, suggested to him that perhaps they had contrived for him the matchless horror of a living tomb in these vast labyrinths. Under the influ-

ence of this thought he dared not for several instants draw his silken line, lest he should find that it was severed from the stake at the entrance of the cavities. In that case to retrace his way was scarcely possible, and to perish of starvation and despair was the probable alternative! But this apprehension grew more terrible than any certainty, and he plucked the ball convulsively — but the sharp jerk convinced him that his fear was unfounded; and before he had time to form any more disastrous conjectures, light gleamed down a gallery whence he had not expected it, and voices were echoed in whispers down the walls, some time before the speakers appeared. And when they entered, their aspect was not calculated to dispel the sinister gloom of the solitude they disturbed.

The foremost was a personage enveloped in a long black mantle and mask, with a plumed hat slouched over it; another followed him who was garbed like a Spanish man-at-arms, his visage shaded by the long tattered hair which hung from under his morion. A third came, holding a torch, and apparently directing the advance of the two first by its light. He was an aged man, to judge by his stoop and his dragging gait, but was too completely enveloped in his garb of a Black Penitent to be more narrowly scrutinized. He leaned upon a long black wand, curiously inlaid with figures and stars, and carried on his humpy shoulders a scarlet sack, in which were probably some instruments of his art.

CHAPTER VI.

A NIGHT IN THE CATACOMBS.

"*Hecate.* O, well done! I commend your pains;
And every one shall share i' the gains."
Macbeth.

"METHINKS the holy air is wondrous musty, Dom Sabbat! yet it should be dry and warm, sithence we are descended nearly as deep as hell!" said the foremost, whose tone of lurid gaiety revealed him to be Cæsar Borgia. "How much deeper must we plunge ere the fiends are near enough to hear our evocations?"

"Signor, this place may serve the purpose; we can make the circle wide enough," replied the necromancer, pausing, and in a voice which, however feeble and whistling with age, struck the Hospitaller as if he had heard it before. "But I must have assistance, and will summon two wise sisters of the art; we are ever willing to do each other turns of aid and kindness."

Slightly withdrawing from his companions Dom

Sabbat drew a sharp blue-gleaming knife from his bundle, pricked himself in the arm, and advanced towards a remote gallery in front, sprinkling little drops of his blood as he went, and uttering some strange words with great rapidity, in a raised tone, as if calling to some one in the distance. Numerous discordant and gibbering echoes answered, and suddenly there was heard a violent whirr of wind; after a pause, during which it increased, and seemingly hurried in upon it, two haggard old women came rushing down the gallery, and entered with their robes heaped up about them, full apparently of herbs, shrieking emulously, "We come, we come!"

"Leave mumbling to thy saints, Migueloto, or perchance thou wilt mar our spell," said Cæsar, impatiently. "Look, man, they are thine old friends—the witches of the Ghetto."

The sorceresses, greeting Cæsar with a fantastic bend, pointed their skinny fingers at the trembling castellain, and mowed and laughed in concert.

"Devils may not affright ye, hags, being your daily and nightly company," said Migueloto, angrily. "But an I had my way, ye should not laugh so soon after your granddaughter's mad prank had perilled us all."

"Peace, fool; the mothers were in no less hazard,—but the meddling monkish knight may live to rue it to his heart's core," said Cæsar, gloomily. "And now, my potent Sabbat, since thy weird helpmates are here, wherefore dost thou pause and look at me?"

"Signor! I would clearly understand your will, which as yet you but dubiously hint," replied the magus, in a calm and confident tone.

"I have seen that thou hast power to raise the dead—for didst thou not show me Charlemagne in the magic mirror?" said Cæsar, with some unusual pauses of hesitation. "But now I would have thee summon me a spirit that will not need perchance so powerful a spell, for it is wandering still in some shadowy realm between this and the nothingness into which all things return—or the fixed eternity which priests avouch. Whatever it be, I would question it to learn what it would have to be at rest, and leave darkening my sunshine and thwarting me in all my ways!"

"What spirit, then, wouldst thou bid me summon, Cæsar?" replied the necromancer. "My spells have no power over the blessed; and some are damned even below adjurations which compel the fiends from the centre."

"The blessed!—nay, for he perished in mortal sin, and albeit loved by women, I do misdoubt me the greybeard Peter looks not on men's actions with their eyes," said Cæsar, after a moment's meditation. "Make thy circles, and utter thy spells, and I will tell thee anon whom I would behold!"

The necromancer took his staff, and made some mystic signs at three points of the cavern, muttering in some unknown language to himself; he then threw it forward, and it struck quivering in the sand, and to the affrighted eyes of the gazers for some instants resembled a fiery serpent coiling and hissing

over the spot. The magician advanced, and taking his staff as the centre, drew a circle round it, partly linked in which he drew another of greater extent, with a pentacle in the midst, and a third of similar size to the first. He then commanded the assistant hags to trench the circles by casting up the sand with little brass shovels which they had brought, all the time pronouncing some Hebrew words which he taught them; and clapping their hands and shrilly exclaiming, "A master of the cabala! a master!" they set to work with great zeal and evident expectation of some portentous results, exchanging mysterious nods of satisfaction. In the operation of delving numerous fragments of bones and skulls turned up, which Sabbat seized and placed round the second circle.

"Tell me now, my son, whether the spirit we are to evoke was violently expelled from the carcass; and if so, when, and where?" said the necromancer, proceeding with his labours while Cæsar threw himself into a reclining position, as if wearied, on the ground, and watched his progress.

"What matters it to know this?" he replied, burying his hand in the sands, and seeming to divert himself by suffering it to squeeze through his fingers.

"To make the circle of capacity to resist the wrath of the spirit, which else might tear the questioner to pieces, or blast him with fire from hell," said Dom Sabbat.

"Hell's vassals are then as rebellious as those of the church," said Cæsar, smiling darkly. "A violent death!—ay, such indeed it was; but these good

dames can tell you how Francesco, Duke of Gandia, fell."

"He had dishonoured the pure blood of our father —pure from Enoch," said Notte, fiercely tossing back her matted grey hair as she glared up from her toils. Her sister, the grisly Morta, paused, too, and added with a bitter laugh, "But she was so beautiful, Notte!"

"But wherefore slain? thou, signor, didst not strike to avenge the blood of Enoch?" said Dom Sabbat.

"I was not born to be a younger brother!—his light made mine shadow! But thou hast heard tidings of this ere now!" returned Cæsar.

"Was there no other cause? No damning spot in thy brother's soul which we may use as a spell against the apparition's wrath?" said Dom Sabbat, with emphatic meaning.

"Yea, master; for it was my lord's urging of the justice of his brother's death in the guilt of his passion for Donna Lucrezia, which wrought me to work in it," said Migueloto, who beheld the preparations with increasing agitation.

"Peace, idiot! this is neither time nor place for those false mutterings which thou didst feign to believe in hope to cheat the devil, and murder with angelic approbation," interrupted Cæsar. "These tales were but mine own whispers echoed; and if Francesco's soul had no other stain than this imputed happiness, he were indeed beyond the power of your spells; what say ye? It was she, not I, that murdered him—when she dared to complain to him of

that moment's madness, and the puffed-up boy threatened me with his vengeance."

The necromancer's eyes gleamed fearfully through the holes in his black hood, and he resumed his labours muttering, "We must weave the spell thrice; for the injured have a power which their wrongers dream not!"

Not a word of this unconscious confession escaped the strained hearing of the Hospitaller.

While the hags delved a second trench round the circles the necromancer placed a low tripod in the first, upon which he set a brazen chafing-dish, kindled a fire beneath it, and from the herbs which the witches had brought, and many others in his own sack, selected the materials for a fumigation. Cæsar continued for some time apparently engaged in scanning the ornaments and sepulchral inscriptions of the subterraneous chapel, for as such many of the monuments attested that the persecuted Christians of the first ages had used it.

"These ghosts of thine are like women, Dom Sabbat," he said at length, with wild levity. "They will come when not asked, and when asked will none of it."

"The spirit may have power given it to withstand my spell, wherein I am not to blame," replied the necromancer. "As yet I have not uttered it—but the time is at hand! Sisters, sit in the first circle, and repeat the names I must pronounce; but wherefore trembles this soldier? The spirit will appear only to its murderer, if at all."

"We had all a share in the work; let us all behold

it! I hate the Nazarene still!" girned Morta between her numerous and fang-like teeth.

"Why, so do I! I hate him, and fear him not," said Cæsar, springing up on his feet. "Dastard! he was my brother, yet thou seest I do not quiver in a nerve!"

"Beware that thou utter no prayer, or we are all at the mercy of the fiends!" said Dom Sabbat, gazing at the pallid captain of Santangelo, whose teeth chattered audibly. "Enter the circle, if thou wouldst be safe, and fear not—until thine hour comes! Duke Cæsar, thy station is within the pentacle of the second circle."

Migueloto mechanically obeyed the directions of the sorcerer, while Cæsar advanced boldly, leaped into the pentacle, and stood with folded arms in a resolved or perhaps sceptical attitude. The sage then returned to the foremost circle, which he alone occupied, knelt, and took a curious volume of oriental manuscript, illuminated with magic figures and signs, from his breast, and taking the only torch which they had brought, he thrust it into the sand and extinguished it.

The little light which remained was furnished from the livid flames which burned under the sorcerer's chafing-dish, from which Alfonso perceived that there arose a thick dark smoke, full of some strange perfume. With all the reasons which he had to suspect some fraud in the necromancer's exhibition, so strong and general was the belief in the marvels of sorcery, that he gazed with all the horror and fascination which the expectation of beholding an

inhabitant of the vast unknown might well occasion. But, despite the horror which Cæsar's crimes necessarily excited, there was something sublime in the fixed and unquailing courage with which he seemed to await the issue of the terrific experiment. Perhaps the feeling which supported him was akin to that of a man stretching forth a diseased limb to be amputated, because it is the only means of deliverance from an intolerable and enduring anguish, for he murmured several times, half unconsciously and aloud, "Let it take some form—aught but that darkness—and I will not fear it!"

"Silence, silence! the sisters give not due responses, for they hear not my words!" said the necromancer angrily, and continuing to read from his book in a language which was unknown to all but himself and the hags. The Hospitaller's incredulity was soon shaken. Mutterings as if of thunder sounded remotely among the galleries, and seemed to be approaching nearer and nearer. Fiery hieroglyphics ran along the sandy earth and the sepulchral walls of the cavern, while the necromancer calmly read on without raising his eyes, and the witches continued their chaunt in mingled terror and enthusiasm until it rose like the shrieking of sea birds in a storm.

Suddenly the brazier began to sparkle and hiss, and seemed to bubble over with coloured serpents and flames. A deathly mephitic odour filled the cavern, which produced a strange and swooning languor even in Alfonso, although removed from its immediate action. The feeling was brief, but it left

a kind of dreamy intoxication on the senses, so that when, raising his eyes from the group, he saw what seemed to be legions of hideous spectres and demons of the most grotesque and horrible forms crowding into the cavern, and flitting up and down the walls, he gazed with the strange imperturbability with which we look on the direst phantasmagoria of sleep. The majority of these apparitions made gestures of disdain, or mouthed contemptuously at the silent tenants of the circles.

"It is in vain; they spurn our offerings; nothing is acceptable to them but the newly shed blood of children and virgins!" muttered Dom Sabbat, in a low and disappointed tone. "They will not answer. Hags, adjure your father, the cruel and aged sorcerer, to aid us, for he is surely among these demons!"

"'Tis false!" shrieked Morta, in spite of the terror which shook her withered carcass. "These have not the countenances of the children of our tribes; and he ever loathed thine worse than the plague, living, and will not consort with them, dead!"

"More mandragora! hark at its pleasant shrieks! Surely we lack some potent ingredient," said Dom Sabbat, hurriedly. "The sweat of a murderer's right hand in the flames!—Yet if these are spirits we have spells more persuasive than the material unctions of the grave! Speak, Cæsar! remind them of all the direst deeds by which thou hast merited their aid and favour. Speak, or I have no longer power to detain them, or compel submission."

"By the passion which consumes my soul! by the spouse of Christ whom I won from His altars! by the dying curse of Sultan Zem! by the blood of my brother!" exclaimed Cæsar; and observing that the spectral hosts gradually waned away, he added still more frantically, "Nay, then, demons, spirits, whatever ye are, hear me, for ye shall hear me! If the Church of God be hateful to ye—by the damning calumnies I have breathed against its head! suffer this spirit I demand to appear before me!"

A moment of profound and awful silence followed, and then an universal shriek arose from all the gazers, even from the necromancer himself, excepting Cæsar, who stood fixed and immoveable as a figure carved in ebony—for a pale and ghastly blue light gleamed down the gallery in the opposite wall of the cavern, and a darkness appeared in it whose presence chilled the life-blood in Alfonso's veins. And yet there was no precise outline of form or feature; vague hues of armour, and of a mantle and rich surcoat deeply stained with gore and the green ooze of corruption; some ghastly indistinctness of a visage and waving plumes,—was all that was discernible.

"Demon or angel, or whatever thou art!" gasped Cæsar at length, while the necromancer glared as if petrified at the horror he had himself raised, and Migueloto sank senseless on the sand. "Yea, yea, for it is he! even as we left him in the vaults of Santa Maria!—Francesco! brother!—no, brother I will not call thee," he continued in the tones of a madman raving in his cell. "Stay, speak! or my soul must burst in its silence!—Speak! if because

thou wert slain in mortal sin—in the arms of one of the accursed tribes—thy soul cannot win rest, and torments me thus! if it be thy hell to make mine! Oh, speak, and say what penance, what prayer, what masses numberless, can win me forgiveness and thee peace!"

There was a silence.

"Cæsar!" replied a low unearthly voice, which sounded as if from the depths of the grave, and yet in tones of supernatural sweetness and sorrow, not unmingled with compassion.

"Oh, I am here!" shrieked the maddening fratricide.

"Cast off those robes to wear which thou hast emulated Cain the first murderer!—resume thy priestly habit; bestow thy sister on whomsoever her love shall choose, were he the meanest of thy serfs; wear out thy days in penance and prayer and holy works, and in perpetual labour to obliterate and refute the hideous calumnies thy villany has spread!—and heaven may yet be merciful!"

"Never, never, never, fiend! thou but assumest his gentle form to torture me!" raved Cæsar. "Bid me, if thou wilt, when I am master of Italy, redeem the Holy Sepulchre from the hands of the infidels, or perish in the enterprise!—endow temples to pray for thy unpeacefully parted soul. Nay, *do* thy worst, destroy, if thou canst! I defy thee. Boy, that wert so loved and beautiful! spirit, though thou art! yea, I will torture thee, too. Thy darkness—yea, let it be present—when the crown of the ancient Cæsar is set upon my brow—and when Lucrezia sits throned my

empress beside me in the majesty of her supreme beauty, and all the earth, I care not whether in love or fear, shouts 'Well done! well done!'" But even as he concluded the words with frantic defiance and exultation, the apparition disappeared in supervenient darkness with a long and melancholy shriek which sounded like a farewell to all hope.

The dead red light of the brazier now reappeared which the supernatural glare had darkened; and Alfonso, half senseless as he himself remained, felt that a long silence ensued.

"Dom Sabbat!" at length exclaimed the voice of Cæsar, in a wondrously fixed and firm tone; "let us have light. This is strange jugglery!—didst thou hear what the devil said in that fair disguise?"

"Cæsar! listen to me; it is a true spirit thou hast beheld," gasped the necromancer. "My spells could not raise it. It is a spirit sent from heaven to warn thee to repentance; and I adjure thee, as thou livest, and must live for ever, repent, and save thy soul from the burning grasp which is upon it."

"This is goodly advice from thee, Dom Sabbat," exclaimed Cæsar, with a wild laugh. "Repent!—turn monk and mumbler of masses! Give Lucrezia to the arms of the first beggar who wins her woman's liking!—to the hot Englishman, perchance—or the frosty spy of Ferrara? Away!—hast thou forgotten that thyself didst show me the descendants of Lucrezia all crowned, and with wreaths which made those of the Cæsars dim?"

"I remember," groaned the magus.

"Then art thou answered," said Cæsar, gaspingly.

"Yet, once again let me tax the powers of thy so mighty art. Command thy spirits to show me the form of him whom Lucrezia loves—or shall love; —that in obeying the spirit's behest we may not mistake our bridegroom."

"It is in vain; the fiends are weary, and will no longer obey my spells," said the necromancer, drawing himself slowly up, and gazing with convulsive shudders around him. For the first time the listening Hospitaller noticed the extraordinary change in the tones of his voice, which were now deep, melancholy, and musical, and strongly reminded him of those of Fra Bruno.

"I say, they will—they shall, pronounce the words; I will echo thee," returned Cæsar, with mad velocity. "Ask only if it be a vowed Knight of St. John. And yet it cannot be.—Did she not attempt to poison him on the day of the tourney?"

"My lord, no! I can certify thee to the contrary, who prepared the draught for a rival who desired his shame in that fatal show!" exclaimed Dom Sabbat, pantingly. "But urge me not to this task. The reluctant spirits will not obey but on words which will shake the mountain above us."

"Shake the universe, if thou wilt, but let my soul be satisfied!" ejaculated Cæsar.

"Back to thy pentacle, or the fiends will seize the instant to tear thine heart out!" said Sabbat, as Cæsar strode forward in his eagerness. "I will do what I may—but they will not listen to me."

Cæsar obeyed, wiping the dark sweat from his brows with both his hands in a stream; and the ne-

cromancer resumed his spells, but with seeming feebleness and reluctance. Even Cæsar's agonizing anxiety was now amply shared by the Knight of St. John. He forgot every restraint of prudence in his eagerness, and stepped altogether out of his concealment to gaze. It is true that the cavern was nearly in complete darkness, for the brazier threw only a narrow circular light around its tripod, revealing the bending figure of the sorcerer, and touching the edges of the duke's garment and the tip of his plume with a fiery red. But most unluckily and suddenly a bright light shot up from the brazier, and streamed a strong reflection on the figure of the Hospitaller. The Jewesses, who had turned their heads away in terror from the spectral presence, beheld him, and uttering a simultaneous shriek, Cæsar and the necromancer both started round—and clearly discerned him for an instant ere he precipitately retired. He remembered afterwards that Cæsar nodded to him as if in pleased and sarcastic recognition, while Sabbat, uttering a groan of unutterable anguish, sank on the earth,

An instant's intense listening convinced Alfonso that no suspicion of his corporeal presence had crossed the fear-struck imaginations of the spectators. Cæsar stepped from his pentacle into the magician's circle, and raised the necromancer with an exclamation which sounded more like one of contempt than of pity. But suddenly a new and fatal project occurred to the ever-restless thoughts of the Borgia. "Migueloto," he said, "after what we have seen to-night Sabbat's visage cannot affright us, though it

be the fiend's; but happen what may, I will see it now at last. His faintness needs air." And drawing his dagger with the word, he cut the girdle of the Black Penitent, and tearing his hood open uttered a loud cry as the countenance beneath was revealed —"Fra Bruno!"

After a pause of amazement which for a time deprived the gazers of all power of movement, Cæsar burst into a frantic peal of laughter which rung far and near through the galleries; and clutching his brows as if he imagined his intellect to be wavering, he gazed stedfastly and incredulously at the friar's visage.

"Migueloto, is this some jeer of the fiend, or art thou a traitor?" he exclaimed at length, suddenly clutching the castellain by the throat.

"My lord! and as I live, I know not by what miracle—if this be Friar Bruno—he is out of Sant-angelo," said Migueloto.

"We will learn by the manner of his return; yet men have long deemed the monk, too, a sorcerer," said Cæsar, musingly. "And 'tis strange what suspicions have at times crossed me, which all come thronging back upon me now. Let none feign to have seen him; extinguish the fire; we must have his guidance out of these labyrinths, or we may wait long for any other."

Strong convulsions announced the sorcerer's return to sensation, and Cæsar kicking over the brazier extinguished the last gleam of light; then he raised Sabbat and adjusted his hood, while he seemed engaged in endeavouring to loosen it. It is probable

that Sabbat's first use of his restored sense was to baffle this attention, but the Hospitaller only distinguished that he uttered some incoherent thanks; and after a short consultation, and gropings in the dark for some of the books and instruments of his unlawful art, it seemed that he resumed his office of guide, and the whole evil company trooped off in his train.

It was not until the last echo of their footsteps died away, and silence had for some time succeeded, that Alfonso recovered from the overwhelming confusion of his thoughts, and remembered his own situation. Lucrezia, innocent of all the direful crimes imputed to her! for a brief moment all the powers of his soul were absorbed in the thrice-blessed conviction. Lucrezia, the paramour of Sir Reginald! rolled back the whole tide of happiness almost as instantly. The memory of her former love for himself—of the splendid promises affixed to its possession—nigh overwhelmed him. He rushed from his concealment, as if he hoped to be yet in time to tear her from his rival's arms, from ineffaceable dishonour; and it was not until he had reached the floor of the subterraneous chapel that he recollected his ball of silk, and found that he had dropped it in the precipitation of his retreat from the gaze of the necromancers!

In the first horror of this discovery every other thought was confounded. He remounted with wild velocity to the place of his concealment, and groped on his hands and knees until even the obstinacy of hope was subdued, in a vain search for the ball. He

then concluded that it had jerked down into the cavern, and he spent a long time as fruitlessly feeling over the sand within any possible limit, forgetful of all things else in heaven and earth but that single little twist of silk. At last the want of light struck him as being the only reason why he could not find the clue; and remembering the brazier, he staggered forward, as he imagined, to the scene of the magic operation, staring into the thick darkness in search of the least gleam or spark. But Cæsar had too well extinguished all, and save those which burst from his own strained eyeballs no glimpse of the comfortable element appeared. Convinced that all his researches were in vain, he endeavoured to persuade himself that it was easy to return by the way he came; and turning, he hastened on in a straight direction, as he imagined, until suddenly the passage became so narrow that he could no longer force himself along without pressing against the wall on both sides—a thing which he remembered had not happened to him in his advance. All minor fears now vanished in the overwhelming thought that he was perhaps entangled beyond extrication in these black windings of the earth—buried alive!—and the Hospitaller pushed his way back, calling for assistance at the loudest pitch of his voice. The innumerable and awful echoes of the city of the dead replied —but no sound of rational intelligence.

Still he found himself in a wider space, and although the darkness was too thick to discern any object, the thought struck Alfonso that if he could, by groping, distinguish the archway at which he had

entered the cavern, it might guide him in retracing his way, or he might possibly find the ball, which could not run very far after its descent to the ground from his hiding-place. How long he consumed in these researches he knew not, nor calculated, groping along the rocky walls, and meeting with many openings, but none so wide, or of a different form, from that which he sought; and, moreover, he was convinced at length that he was not in the sepulchral chapel, but pursuing the course of a long gallery. Then he remembered that the learned Bembo once in his father's court, speaking of these caverns, declared he had read in some ancient record that they extended as far as Ostia, a distance of twenty miles, and were so infinitely perplexed and winding that it was scarcely possible to hit on the proper way through them.

Learning seldom presented herself in a more terrible guise, and in the despair of the instant Alfonso clutched his dagger to assure himself that he had yet a means of escape from the horrors of the fate which awaited him. Then again, strung with the energy of despair, he pushed recklessly forward, pursuading himself that Bembo's stories were a poet's legends to make men marvel, and that if he pursued his course in a direct line he could not fail to come to some outlet. On he went, strengthened by finding that the ground beneath his feet ascended as if to the upper world; but after pursuing the way to a considerable distance, he suddenly came with a shock against hard and solid rock, which barred all farther progress.

For some moments, delirious with mental agony, he laboured to persuade himself that all he had seen and heard was a dream; and in truth the wild, incongruous and horrible events which he had witnessed in so rapid a phantasmagoria, favoured the supposition. He laughed aloud at the irrational idea that he could have been induced to incur so fearful a risk on the vague persuasions and assurances of the Borgia's paramour; he persuaded himself that he had put into the mouth of a phantom Cæsar the shapings of the suspicions which had long floated in his own mind; and the terrific visitant from the unknown world, in its vague and misty horrors, was an attempt of the imagination to picture to itself the form of the unhappy Duke of Gandia. The metamorphosis of the aged sorcerer into Fra Bruno was surely a feat in a wild dream; and the total and unaccountable disappearance of Fiamma from the scene in which she seemed to be a necessary part; the whole circumstance of the magic vision; the beldames' arrival on a whirlwind; the demons and grinning phantoms—were all but parts of a hideous illusion! But when he strove to awaken himself, the irresistible evidence of the senses compelled him to belief in the reality of the horrors which encircled him. He felt that his powers of body and mind were alike deserting him; his ideas rushed together and passed through his brain in confused whirls; his heart beat with the strokes of a hammer against his ribs; thick dews streamed from his visage; he staggered a few steps back from the rocky bar, and reanimating himself with a desperate effort, essayed

to run back the distance he had come, when suddenly he heard a loud crash and rumble of fragments of stone and sand around him—it seemed as if the earth were sinking in above him—all thought and recollection vanished, and a deathly lethargy came over him in which he sank on the ground.

How long this stupor lasted he knew not, but he awoke with a fearful start, and found his limbs nearly all benumbed, and a fiery thirst consuming his vitals. He gaped, and found his tongue and throat stiff with dust; but it was some time before he had any clear recollection of his position, raising himself with difficulty, and staring wildly around in the darkness. At first, indeed, he had a confused and half-frenzied persuasion that he had been mortally wounded in a conflict with Sir Reginald le Beaufort, and that he was about to make a last effort to tear Lucrezia from his arms; but when what had really happened came pouring back in disordered visions on his memory, he laid himself down again, and endeavoured to compose himself with the belief that a fearful dream still haunted his waking thoughts. But the stony fragments on which he lay, and the rank smell which saluted his nostrils, startled him up again; and the instantaneous and clear conviction which returned upon him brought with it a shock which must have overwhelmed any reason less firmly poised.

His natural courage and the instinct of self-preservation revived the Hospitaller's dormant energies; and now a thought stirred up his soul which might have breathed life into death itself, in the burning

contrast which his imagination presented of his own situation and that of his rival. The horrors of the doom which awaited himself found an inexplicable parallel in the as overwhelming delights and triumph in which Sir Reginald revelled; the darkness and terrors of his living tomb marvellously recalled the clearest and most alluring visions of the bright, blooming earth above,—the blue heavens—the glory of the sun! The glimpses of the dismal phantom of death, which crossed his imagination almost visually, were strangely accompanied by the beauteous form of Lucrezia, more richly tinted with the shame and rapture of her guilty joys, and yet matchless in the effulgence and allurement of her charms. A mad desire for revenge superseded even the thirst for life and air; or rather life appeared to the Hospitaller to mean only the satisfaction of his vengeance.

In this frenzy his strength returned, and he groped eagerly forward to retrace the way which he remembered he had wandered into, when suddenly he encountered resistance, and felt heaps of crumbling materials which gave way as he touched them. The recollection of the noise and fall he had heard instantly occurred to him, and with an agony deeper than all he had yet felt the thought rushed upon him that the rock and sand had fallen in behind him, and for ever barred all exit. Every effort which he made confirmed this dismal thought, and then indeed did he yell and shriek until it seemed as if his cries must pierce the solid earth, and reach some helpful ear. Again and again did he pause in utter exhaustion, and renew his cries, and super-

stition now contributed her aid to the destruction of the victim. His attempts to overwhelm the pontiff with ignominy had, he imagined, brought down the wrath of heaven upon him, and that his escape was cut off by supernatural agency. For a time he yielded to this tremendous thought, and changed all his efforts into the most fervent supplication for mercy or immediate destruction, and vehement prayers to the unnumbered martyrs whose bones tenanted the immense sepulchre, for intercession.

The hollow echoes which returned his voice from above, at first reanimated him with the frantic hope that supernatural things heard and repeated to each other the utterings of his despair, but gradually suggested a more rational thought to him. Remembering the great height of some of the excavations, and the yawning fissures which he had observed in the galleries, the hope flashed upon him that he might climb to some exit, since all was denied him below. He tossed his arms on high, and no roofing met them; yet for several minutes he dared not attempt to ascertain by experience the fallacy or assurance of his last hope. But the agony of doubt grew insupportable; and he raised himself by pressing against the narrow walls, husbanding every inch which stood between him and despair. He continued to draw himself up with convulsive vibrations, and oh, the ecstasy! the rift gradually widened, until at length the broad breast of the Hospitaller heaved freely, and he was compelled to mount by pressing with his feet and back against the dividing walls. A few instants more, and his feet found no resist-

ance but the sharp edge of the excavation, and with a rapture which swelled his heart almost to bursting he leaped forth into an open space.

Groping his way in utter darkness, still Alfonso felt that there was no hope but in endeavouring to explore some exit, at whatever risk. On he went, unconscious whether every step he took was not leading him further to destruction, scarcely able to breathe in the slab and stagnant air, which seemed as thick with mephitic vapours as if it were the mouldiness which clothed the numberless carcasses of the dead. Still he would not yield; still he hurried distractedly on, until vanquished with fatigue and despair, scarcely able to drag his limbs along, he paused to rest for an instant, and in that instant heard the barking of a dog.

All his energies returned as if with an infusion of new blood; he rushed on, as nearly as he could guess, in the direction whence he had heard the barking of the dog, and which fortunately continued at intervals, as if the animal scented him. In a short time he perceived a faint brightness, low, but of very considerable breadth. Rocky fragments, touched with a fiery glow, appeared at some distance before him, and thence the barking of the dog most certainly came. Continuing his advance, he perceived that he was in an excavation which gradually decreased in height, until it formed a jagged opening like the gaping valves of an oyster, through which the light was visible. He was obliged to crawl on his hands and knees to the fissure, and

found that it was at some height in the rocks of a cavern below, in which were several groups of men sleeping round a fire, while the dog, finding his efforts to arouse them useless, stood growling and glaring upward. The Hospitaller was about to call for assistance, when fortunately one of the sleepers raised his head, and exclaimed, "Down, beast, and the curse of Saint Antony upon thee!" in the fierce tones of John of the Catacombs.

Alfonso was aware that he had little favour to expect from the hands of this ruffian, and the personages associated with him were of his own class, though some of them were garbed as soldiers and peasants, mingled with one or two deformed beggars whom he remembered to have seen crawling about the streets, and on the steps of churches. Nearly all these fellows were armed with some instrument of offence; cross-bows, daggers, bucklers of steel and bulls' hides, which they used as pillows, lay all about. Creature comforts were not neglected; fragments of a roasted kid, eggshells, and chestnuts, with several goatskins of wine, were visible in a kind of cupboard formed by a projection of the rocks.

The danger of trusting himself to the mercy of these banditti was obvious, and considering that they probably went early abroad on their predatory occupations, Alfonso resolved to await the result. He perceived that it would not be difficult to descend into the cavern, the stones in its sandy walls forming a flight of natural though very irregular stairs; and it was certain that the robbers would have some easy

access to their place of refuge. Calmed with this hope he imitated his friend, the dog, which crouched in submission to its master's command, still glowering uneasily and watchfully upward. He lay down, and endeavoured to compose the direful agitation of his blood and spirits; but recollection on recollection came heaving them into wilder tumults, and the events of the last few hours, in which seemed crowded the thoughts and sufferings of years, rushed back with almost visual distinctness. But all that he had endured of physical agony was little compared with the mental frenzy with which he remembered the obstacle which, when every other was removed, had arisen between his passion and Lucrezia. The identity of Fra Bruno with the necromancer had indeed excited his suspicions that some imposture had been played in the fearful phantasmagoria he had witnessed, or that the result had not answered the plans of the contrivers; but in nowise invalidated the unconscious testimony of Cæsar to his sister's innocence. And yet, at this very hour, the jealous imagination of the Hospitaller suggested scenes of the voluptuous triumphs of his young rival more richly coloured and resplendent than ever Ovid dreamed in his warmest mood, and in which the recollections of the cave of Egeria remorselessly aided. Every perfection of her loveliness which his doating fancies had often dwelt upon in unobserved but most passionate contemplation, his fancy—like a painter skilled by long practice—threw into forms which made his soul sicken with hatred and the thirst of re-

venge, even in contemplating its own limnings. And yet so utter was his physical prostration that he sank at length into a sleep, tormented by dreams, which, strangely enough, related but slightly to his recent sufferings. Once indeed he imagined that he was a living soul fixed in a marble statue, incapable of all movement, and doomed to remain so for ever; but when he awoke at length, panting and struggling for breath, it was because he dreamed he looked down a precipice, and saw Lucrezia and Sir Reginald asleep on a bank of roses at the base, with the bright cheek of Lucrezia resting bloomily on her lover's shoulder. Perhaps it was in reality the sound of voices which broke this painful vision, for the moment he awoke he distinguished that of John of the Catacombs.

The worthy was apparently commenting on the strange barking of his dog in the night. "I shall not take Cerbero with me to-day, for I misdoubt some colony of rats is scenting us out," he said. "I should not marvel to see some hundreds of them come pouring down the rocks there, for Heaven knows what is within that yawning mouth with its ill-set teeth! So I shall leave him loose, and bring him a bull's heart for his supper."

This was said to the only second person who remained in the cave, another bravo, who was busied in sharpening a stiletto on his leather sandals, and who nodded assent without looking up. Alfonso resigned himself to wait until these lingerers should also be pleased to depart; and at last the longed-for

minute came. Poor Cerbero seemed the only one discontented with the arrangement, perhaps from a presentiment of his fate. He made several ineffectual attemps to follow his brutal master, who spurned him back, and finally kicked him severely to make him understand his pleasure that he should remain on guard against the rats. The animal at last submitted, and stood looking long and wistfully after his master as he retired up a sand-walk which probably led to the open air. The creature then began dejectedly to lick its flanks, occasionally pausing to listen as if it still heard the distant footsteps.

Alfonso confided in the auscultation of the hound, a large wolf dog of a noble species; and it was not until it stretched itself hopelessly down that he ventured on his descent. His first movement startled the dog, but when he thrust his body half through the cleft in the rock, it gave a fierce yell, and sprang so high in the air at him that he became aware of a new and very formidable opponent. The danger grew imminent, for, finding his spring had failed, Cerbero began scrambling up the rocks to get at his visitor; and feeling the peril of awaiting the attack in his narrow confinement, Alfonso drew his dagger, and thrust himself wholly out. In an instant Cerbero, who had reached the rock below, sprang at him, and in the next fell with the weapon buried in its throat to the ground, without a single howl or struggle.

There was no great difficulty in the rest of the

enterprise. The gallery was straight, and ended in an excavation so nearly choked with briars and bushes, that only those familiar with the haunt perceived a way into it by creeping beneath the matted foliage. The open Campagna was beyond, and in a few moments Alfonso was standing in the sun, dizzy and drunk with joy and the exhaustion of his night of agonies.

CHAPTER VII.

"Such rage inflames the wolf's wild heart and eyes,
Robbed as he thinks, unjustly, of his prize."

COWLEY.

IT was brightening into the dawn which followed that perilous night, and the first faint glimmer which entered the chamber of tortures in Santangelo lighted the livid and passion-gleaming visage of Cæsar Borgia.

He was in earnest discourse with Fiamma Colonna, who, seated on an instrument of torture resembling a cross, with joints and steel screws, was calmly reasoning against a suspicion, which it seemed had caused this early visit, that the superstitious castellain suffered Fra Bruno to wander from his captivity at pleasure.

"Nay, with mine own eyes I have beheld him!" he exclaimed, impatiently interrupting her. "I watched him home to Santangelo, and I will know who gives him means to spread his seditions abroad, since Migueloto, thou sayest, truly denies all part in it, or the rack on which thou leanest shall fail for the first time!"

Fiamma smiled disdainfully at the cruel instrument, and replied carelessly, "Are men to be so subdued, by fleshly torments merely?"

"And dost thou feign that thy female sinews might not shrink in the ordeal?" returned Cæsar, with a strange glare.

"I have a torture within which mocks at all things of fear and anguish!" replied Fiamma; and the door opening as she spoke, admitted Migueloto with his prisoner, Fra Bruno.

"Your pardon, father, to have disturbed your rest ere cockcrow, the student's hour," said Cæsar, gravely. "For I doubt not it was disturbed—ha, Migueloto?"

"I found the father at his devotion," replied the castellain, reverently.

"I will not long interrupt it, if my questions are as frankly answered as they shall be put," said Cæsar. "Tell me, good friar, art thou not the monk whom in my schoolboy days I beheld with Savonarola, when I waited in the antichamber at Florence for an audience with Pier de' Medici?"

"Even so;—and him to whom you said—'When I am Emperor of Rome I will aid ye to reduce the church back to the most apostolic poverty and vassalage which your dreams can shape,'" replied the Dominican, after a moment's pause.

"Thou rememberest then that boyish gibe?" said Cæsar, musingly.

"And thou hast, meseems, remembered it, too?" replied Fra Bruno, calmly.

"Nay, I forget it not;—and the time of fulfilment

may be nearer at hand than many of us deem," said Cæsar. "And whom could heaven more worthily entrust with such a task, than thee, its saint and martyr? I owe thee a priceless favour, moreover, and I know it. It was thou who released thy penitent Dom Sabbat from vows, and suffered him to aid me in a work which I have much at heart?"

"It was I who suffered him to aid thee in a work which I have much at heart, of which thou art the destined although blind instrument," replied the monk calmly. "I did not think to obtain so early a moment, and yet I was praying for the earliest, when I was summoned—to release myself from every bond of the flesh, and commence at length the predestined toil. It was I who suffered Dom Sabbat to juggle thee with a false show of an apparition in the catacombs—that I might make thee, as I tell thee now thou art—utterly desperate! if it can make thee so to be assured that the plaintive tones which imitated in their sepulchral feebleness the voice of thy departed victim, came from the heart of thy sister, Lucrezia!"

"Monk! what ravest thou?" exclaimed Fiamma, with a gesture full of warning and terror.

"Truths which the rack could not extort from me, lady, and therefore fear not," replied Fra Bruno. "Yes, Duke of Romagna! Lucrezia Borgia was audience to thy confession, wrung from thee by thine own guilt and a conjurer's trick. Henceforth thou art at her mercy, and since thou darest not destroy whom she loves—since the devil that haunts thee will not suffer thee to harm herself—thou hast but

one resource—to destroy the power which makes hers direful to thee—to root out the simony of Roderic Borgia!"

"Monk! demon!—it cannot be but that I dream!" said Cæsar, gasping for breath, and tossing back his dabbled hair from his brow. "I lose my clutch on destiny!—And can it indeed be that the magus Sabbat was but a base spy, an impostor bribed to betray?"

"Nay, but one whose doings are all fated and marked, who even while he cheated thee with a magic play received himself an open and signal assurance of supernatural approbation, when a mumbled spell, which meant he knew not what, convinced him, by raising the phantom of the Knight of St. John, that his suspicions were true, and that it was he whom Lucrezia loved," returned the Dominican.

"Thou hast early intelligence, Fra Bruno!" exclaimed Cæsar, whose agitation bathed his brows in continual rushes of cold sweat, and shook his frame with the convulsive starts and shiverings of an ague. "If this be true, either thou hast accomplices among ourselves, or art thou too a sorcerer? Art thou Sabbat himself? Familiar of hell! I know it, for I beheld thine accursed visage in thy dastard swoon in the catacombs!"

"Then mightst thou have spared thyself the pains to ask," replied the unmoved monk.

"Whence hast thou thy daring? from heaven or from hell?—But I will know or ere we part!" said Cæsar, furiously. "Confess! who set thee on to

act this strange and persevering part which thou hast played, stirring first the fire in my soul with thy visions and prophecies. Confess! or—I will find a way to make thee."

"Bring your tortures; in turns essay your racks, your burning irons; the wild beast's fang; boiling oils, and molten lead; or altogether!—thou canst not harm me," replied Fra Bruno. "I am calm now. I have obeyed the voice. And for my reward, I know that she cannot consummate her guilt, and that your hellish brood must henceforth toil at each other's destruction!—Nor have any ways of death more power over me than is given to them."

"Thou art made of the stuff I need in my designs—and were the moment ripe!" ejaculated Cæsar, his desperate thoughts gleaming madly at his eyes. "But I will use no torture on thee if thou wilt avow by what means thou art wont to leave this castle, and hast effected this impossibility of which thou ravest?"

"Use your tortures, then; I am all marble to endure rather than answer aught on these questions, Borgia!" returned the monk.

"Cæsar! whether from the angels or the fiends, thyself hast seen that the friar hath marvellous powers," said Fiamma, amazed at the Dominican's dangerous revelation.

"Why, then, it was an angel that I beheld open the secret entrance into Adrian's tomb!—yea, for it wore thy form!" said Cæsar, suddenly clutching her hand, gazing fiercely at her, and then dashing it away with violence. "Thou, too—thou, too, hast be-

trayed me. I see all now! Thy friend and ally, the envoy of Ferrara—it was no phantom!—he too was there—in the catacombs—and by thy connivance! Thou wert the masked Venetian that visited him! But I am not so lost as ye all deem; I have provided against even this stroke of treason and all ingratitude."

"Treason and ingratitude!—monster! that would have saved thee by dispersing the darkness thou hast raised round thy sister's name, and inducing the noble envoy of Ferrara to remove her from thy fatal presence as his master's bride!" said Fiamma, starting up, and standing before Cæsar in an attitude of wild and utter defiance.

"We shall learn this anon," returned Cæsar, flashing his fiery eyes, which now burned with diabolical and frenzied brilliancy on Fiamma, but her desperation had passed all fear.

"Yea, I was the masked Venetian whom thy spies observed," she continued. "And what art thou? What art thou, Cain! What art thou, fratricide, seducer, destroyer!—If all thy crimes obtain their just revenges, the fiend himself must abdicate his tortures to thee!—But do thy worst on me; I smile to think that at least thy sister—aha! thy sister!—is warned of all thy cruelties, and beyond thy craft to destroy."

There was a long and dreadful silence, during which Cæsar gazed stedfastly at his prisoners.

"Lead them away!" he said at length to Migueloto, starting as if from a dream. "My brain is on fire!—and since their madness laughs at these paltry tortures around us, I will devise others. Bear them

away, Migueloto!—magic indeed shall they use if either leave these walls again alive!"

"Farewell, then!—but, nay, it should be here—there were a justice in it which might comfort—an expiation to perish by thy hand!" said Fiamma, sinking suddenly from her fury. "Kill me here, Cæsar! I can die as calmly by thy hand as a lamb that has been trained by the butcher follows him to the slaughter-house."

"And therefore thou shalt not," raged the Borgia. "Away with them—to the dungeons beneath the ramparts!"

Migueloto hurriedly obeyed; and returning in an excess of perturbation which kept his whole frame at an aspen tremble, he found Cæsar so lost in thought that it was several minutes ere he noticed his entry.

"My lord!—and is all lost?" he said at length in a hollow whisper.

"Lost! what is lost!—She only knows what she has ever suspected, but she dares not have betrayed me to Alexander!" he exclaimed, noticing the words, but scarcely the speaker. "Away! nothing is lost while I remain to myself. She will reserve it as a spell to guard her beloved, as she deems—a spell of terror. Or dost thou deem we were not already in Alexander's dungeons? Why, if he believed and knew this tale, with his own hand would he avenge his darling fair-haired boy, even in the heart of him whom scandal also calls his son!"

"My lord!"

"But I tell thee all goes well—I have already

foiled them all, and accomplished all my purposes," continued Cæsar, with a kind of delirious vivacity. "Fear not the alliance with Ferrara—it is turned to air! And now I need but proof of the Orsini plottings to force them to give me the lever with which I will lift the world! And who dost thou think shall be my testimony? Even their confidant and Paolo's right hand, the stainless English knight. Thou thinkest that I rave, and deem so, for awhile."

"If we could learn all we have to fear, my lord—from the prisoners," said Migueloto, glancing plaintively round the instruments of torture.

"Thou art mistaken, Catalan; these tortures cannot move them in their present frenzy," said Cæsar, hurriedly. "Nor methinks—I know not why, but even her fierce spirit against me kindles me with—I know not what—but I would not have her fine limbs marred and shattered with these wrenching pangs."

"Hunger and thirst might do something, and yet not harm her beyond repair," suggested the worthy Catalan. "I have known thirst very grievous to bear; and hers would be more clinging since the Tiber flows at her dungeon bars."

'Deny her nought; it is the mind not carcass we must assail!" returned Cæsar, sternly. "And now, get me my Jewish gaberdine and beard, and a fisher-boat to take me to the Ghetto; and do thou remain keeping sure watch and ward in Santangelo; for at the worst I may ally me with the Orsini, and baffle aught her vengeance can project."

The noon of this eventful day witnessed the first

results of the machinations of that direful genius which was now excited to exert its utmost powers. Donna Lucrezia was reclining on a couch in her apartments, ostensibly giving directions relating to the festival in the evening, but frequently forgetting what she said, or whom she addressed, when it was announced that two ancient women humbly desired admittance to her presence. Jewesses of the Ghetto the old women were declared to be, who came with a petition—probably on some of the numerous grievances suffered by their oppressed community. Their names were mentioned, and Lucrezia started and shuddered, and yet instantly commanded their admittance—a condescension to persons of so despised and loathed a class at which her ladies wondered, until their curiosity was excited by remembering the scene in which Miriam had played so prominent a part.

Notte and Morta entered the presence of the lady with deep oriental bends, but the lurking scorn on Notte's blue lips, and the viperous glitter in Morta's eye, caused vague alarm both in Lucrezia and her attendants. But the latter were soon released from their apprehensions, for the lady gave them all permission to retire in a manner which was a command. Yet it was not without almost visible signs of terror that she found herself left alone with the two weird and wicked old women.

The sorceresses on their part stared surprisedly, and exchanged their mute dialogue of looks, when Lucrezia turned on them the full beauty of her

countenance, clouded as it was with an expression of trouble and fear. Notte gave a dark and envious scowl, pursing up her lean lips; but Morta smiled more terribly. Both the hags knelt, and reverentially kissed the hem of a rich cushion near the couch on which Lucrezia reclined.

Glancing with mingled loathing and terror at the fiendish pair, Lucrezia abruptly commanded them to declare their purpose; and both began to reply at once, but Morta soon gained the mastery, for Notte was troubled with an asthmatic wheeze, which quickly exhausted her stock of breath. Morta's explanation, which ran to a great length with her oriental amplitudes, and repetitions of Lucrezia's titles, amounted to a statement that the Senator of Rome, the Lord Orsino, had ordered their community to send them before his tribunal to answer certain charges that, old and withered as they were, they allured Christians to sin with them, by the power of philtres and magic spells, against the laws of Rome and of their own tribes, and under peril of the judgment of fire.

Lucrezia, amidst all her fear and horror, could not forbear a glance of incredulous disgust; but Notte continued in a manner which rapidly fascinated her curiosity and attention—

"True it is, our father taught us the skill of compounding beverages, whose power can overcome any indifference or coldness, or fix the passion of the most capricious and inconstant firm as the pillars of the temple of Solomon," she said. "But, look on us, most beautiful lady; neither wanting many sun-

sets to round our years into a century of time—three generations of men have we seen from the cradle to the tomb."

"Yet, sister, yea, let us confess the truth, for the proofs are known, and what is power if it cannot save?" exclaimed Morta. "Royal mistress! thou hast seen our child, our Miriam. Who can say that we slew or sought the life of her seducer, when to win her back to reason and happiness we have administered to him a wine which has lured him to his former love, and a too late remorse?"

"Hags! fiends! 'tis false!" exclaimed Lucrezia, her bright eyes flashing with fury. "Unless, indeed, ye pretend to have brought him from the grave whither ye—but yet I may believe something of your art. Yea, ye have direful secrets! But it cannot be. Ancient women, ye do but jest, or make vaunt of a science which ye do not, which ye cannot possess. And yet," she added, her cheeks flushing deeply; "and yet—something I have heard. Was it not ye who wrought the spell for the daughter of the Colonnas?"

The sorceresses looked at each other with surprise, but emulously affirmed it.

"Were not my most illustrious lady too beautiful ever to need it—most blest of all the sons of Adam were he on whom she might deign to try the powers of the drink that I can brew," said Morta, her whole skeleton quivering with eagerness.

"I have heard ye spoken of as women of a dark and terrible science; nay, I know it; but ye mock me to speak thus of such poor shows as chance has

gifted me withal, which kindles some, it may be—ah, not to love, not to love!" she said, with a deep sigh. "And yet—were it possible!—it were indeed a rare disport to stir some cold and uncongenial nature with so divine a warmth; an ecstasy to laugh at, as of old they say men laughed at the pranks of their drunken slaves. It might divert a sadness which of late possesses me—ye may have heard I am not wont to it—to behold some such merry ribaldry! I will care that the Orsino stays the meddling of his officers with ye;—but if ye can procure me an elixir of this transcendant power, I will reward your toil as richly as a dying king the physician who restores him to life and health."

"You tax our skill too lightly, glorious princess! This essence is the least of the secrets we possess," returned Notte, chafing her bony hands with joy.

"We have secrets to make a fiend beautiful!" said Morta, willing to support her sister in her vaunts.

"Why, then!" exclaimed Lucrezia, and although she checked herself suddenly, Morta comprehended that she had escaped an involuntary but not flattering candour.

"But we cannot restore the marrows of age; our father died even on the brink of discovering the essences which flowed in the sap of the tree of life," she exclaimed.

Lucrezia mused for several instants profoundly, while the sister apothecaries watched her with intense eagerness; and when suddenly she raised her eyes, and encountered the grey, malignant twinkle in

Morta's wrinkled orbs, she gave a start, and some undefined suspicion seemed to enter her mind. "Spare," she said, "thine eloquence; what I see of your skill I will believe; but be well assured that the ingredients of your charm are harmless, for to mine own lips will I commend it first; and should any ill befall me, worse will happen, as ye may guess, to yourselves and all your tribes, not only in Rome, but throughout the whole Christian world."

Morta herself for one involuntary instant stood amazed and doubtful. "But, lady!" she exclaimed, "you will then share the passion, and it will last perchance as long as yourself."

"And so I would have it," replied Lucrezia. Again the hags looked in astonishment at each other, at a statement so contrary to the received opinions on her volatile character; but bending to the marble pavement, Morta replied with oriental apathy, "The children of thy people were born to command—the children of mine to obey."

CHAPTER VIII.

"Yield up, O Love, thy crown and hearted throne
To tyrannous hate! Swell, bosom, with thy fraught,
For 'tis of aspics' tongues!"

SHAKSPERE.

THE Quest of Ladies was held with all suitable pomp and chivalric ceremonial. The court was assembled in a great saloon of the palace, and it seemed as if Lucrezia had exhausted all the arts of her voluptuous and splendid imagination in preparing the spectacle. The very heavens were in collusion with her—deluging the earth with the glory and melancholy of the setting sun. The music which breathed around, whence none discerned, diffused a delicious sadness like the exhaustion of pleasure. The perfumes of flowers were so subtly mingled, that there was something of farewell tenderness and regret in the faint and dying odours they exhaled.

It might have owed something to the influence of these accessories, but even in the eyes of her most fervent worshippers Lucrezia's beauty had never seemed so perfect as on this fated eve; even

the languor and slight paleness which shaded increased its subduing charm. Unlike the rest of the ladies whom she had chosen to assist in the judgment, she was attired in a Sicilian garb, and wore only a simple wreath of myrtles and crimson aquatic flowers, similar to those which had once decked the hair of the Egerian nymph.

Alfonso was the first of the three tourneyers who mingled with the favoured courtiers admitted to the spectacle; and he watched the arrivals at a distance, with apparently but little interest. But when the Lord Paolo came, surrounded by a concourse of his friends, he bent eagerly forward, and noted the unusual warmth and familiarity of Le Beaufort's salutation, and the deep blush which dyed Lucrezia's face and bosom on receiving it. When he himself appeared before her, she turned pale, and her glance lightened with a singular tearfulness and imploring scrutiny upon him. The obdurate firmness with which he withheld his eyes from hers did then indeed visibly surprise her; but it also prevented him from observing the fierceness with which the Orsino gazed at him from behind the pontiff's chair.

Rallying with a strong and visible effort, Lucrezia declared immediately that the quest was opened. The three competitors were ordered to stand forward, in a space assigned them before their fair judges; and two heralds administered an oath to them, promising on their knighthood, and the honour due to the ladies, to relate truly what had befallen them on their enterprise to win the disputed crown.

As highest in rank, Paolo was called upon to begin, and a cushion of cloth of gold was set for him on which to kneel. Contrary to the general opinion of his eloquence and fluency, he gave a confused and hesitating account of his being the first to enter Capua with Cæsar's storming party, omitting all mention of the gallant part he had taken in the first assault. Le Beaufort reminded him of it, but he took no notice of the prompting beyond a hurried observation that therein he was only the foil of the glory of Le Beaufort himself.

"Ah, and ye call it glory!—so fair a city a ruin now," said Lucrezia. "But so, if it be thus, let Sir Reginald follow with his legend."

The Hospitaller thought that the handsome English knight never looked more so than when, with a joyous and bounding step, he hastened forward, and knelt at Lucrezia's feet with an expression of real adoration. But—doubtless to deceive the gazers—Lucrezia's manner was cold and even displeased. The overflowing joy of the knight was instantly rebuked into limits; and as the particulars of the campaign were of course familiarly known, the very modest account which he gave of his achievements, and his endeavours rather to trumpet the Orsino's exploits than his own—declaring that although the first to enter Capua, he entered it a prisoner, the latter sword in hand, raised general murmurs of admiration.

"You have forgotten the share which you had in so generously rescuing from the plunderers, as a present to the holy Knight of St. John, the sul-

tan's beauteous paramour," said Cæsar, who had glided imperceptibly into the assembly. Lucrezia started, and looked somewhat vacantly at the Hospitaller.

The only refutation which Alfonso deigned to make to this accusation was included in the "round unvarnished tale" which he delivered of his adventures in Capua; in which certes he seemed to acquit Cæsar of any tenderness for the sultan's paramour by the circumstantial account which he gave of his exertions and orders to effect her destruction. Alexander himself shuddered, and glanced with surprise at his son, who smiled, and played with the jewelled hilt of his dagger. But never did the mild and meek Desdemona listen with more heartfelt interest and submissive admiration than now the proud-souled Lucrezia to the stately soldier's narrative. It was even forgotten, in the absorption with which he was listened to, that he continued standing—rather like a king expounding his will than a suppliant pleading his cause. Nor was it possible for the Hospitaller, with all his prepossession, to avoid being moved by the tears, the broken sighs, the long passionate looks of admiration, the heavings of her beauteous bosom, the deep flushes and rapid alternation of paleness, with every mood of the stirring tale. It suddenly and yet irresistibly struck even the exasperated Hospitaller that her ancient liking had returned, and that she had already transferred her licentious passions back to their first object.

But when the Hospitaller calmly related his res-

cue of Fiamma, and the respect with which he had treated her until she fled from his protection, Cæsar laughed aloud, and turning to the ladies, inquired jeeringly if they believed the tale?

"As truly as in mine own existence do I believe in it!" said Lucrezia, with vehement emotion, and though her eyes habitually shunned Cæsar's, they gleamed now upon him with an expression which made him start. "And, dearest ladies," she continued, with a warm gush of tears, "in nowise to prejudice your wisdom, which hath but to judge of the valour of this noble chivalry, yet may we mark our sense of a deed which mingled virtues more godlike, by pledging the Knight of St. John in a precious wine, which none else shall share with us."

Paolo started from the careless attitude in which he affected to stand; but a secret gesture from Cæsar restored him at least to outward tranquillity. Sir Reginald also turned very pale.

"Our sister has had too sharp experience of the Knight of St. John's inflexibility, not to believe in his friar-legend," said Cæsar, laughingly, while Lucrezia beckoned to a black page who stood behind her chair with a golden salver, on which were a goblet and a flask richly chased—but she coloured and glanced at the Hospitaller with a look so full of overpowering recollections, or some strange motive exerted an influence upon him, that kneeling now for the first time, he exclaimed, "Nay, signor, 'tis not in humanity longer to maintain mine heresy against beauty so divine; to whose sovereign sway I yield and profess myself ever the bond slave!"

"The play is played out, then," said Cæsar, with a mystic glance at the Orsino, who smiled luridly.

With a radiance of pleasure which literally lighted up her beauty as if with an unseen sunbeam, Lucrezia gazed at her vanquished antagonist; and though there was much in his countenance to puzzle her scrutiny, her satisfaction vented itself in a renewed passion of tears. Alexander laughed triumphantly as with a hand which trembled aspenly she herself poured a fine crimson wine into the goblet until it swelled over the golden brim. There was a simultaneous bustle of pages and attendants presenting fruit and wine to the guests, and the Orsino mechanically took a peach from a salver which was held to him, but never for a moment averted his gaze from Lucrezia, until she lifted the goblet to her lips, and faltering forth "To thee!" with a glance at the Hospitaller which went to his heart's core, she drank strangely deep in the goblet, and bending over him held it herself to his lips. The sweet evening breeze stirring among her golden hair almost mingled its tresses with the close dark curls of the Hospitaller; and in the trance in which their eyes met neither noticed the pangs which distorted the features of the Orsino, the astonishment of Sir Reginald, or the fiendish smile of Cæsar.

Alexander beckoned to the Orsino and Sir Reginald to approach his own seat, and began laughing and jesting with them somewhat tartly on the strange preferences of women to mild and merciful deeds, even when lured by the glitter and pomp of those of warlike triumph. Paolo felt that he was

purposely drawn away, and yet he affected to answer with perfect gaiety and good humour, while his eye never in reality wandered from Lucrezia. Every instant his sufferings increased, and apparently his resolution to suppress all exterior sign.

If the wine which the Hospitaller drank with Lucrezia were not in reality compounded of magic ingredients, the most potent philtre could scarcely have been more efficacious. For the first time it seemed as if he had yielded up his whole soul and senses to the fascinations of the marvellous beauty; and with such loveliness exhausting upon him all its treasury of infinite charms, wit, and tenderness; stirred by every motive of triumph and rivalry; his heart in reality consumed by passion—even if a deceptive apology had not worked in his own mind, it would scarcely have been possible to resist the spell.

Alexander himself perhaps at length noticed something singular in the length and closeness of the conference; and desired Master Burciardo to inform Lucrezia that he was about to retire. The Orsino observed that after this intimation was delivered the Hospitaller again knelt in farewell thanks for the honour vouchsafed to him; that he uttered some words in a tone so low that it might be called a whisper, and that Lucrezia's whole physiognomy rosied over, her eyes cowered beneath the Hospitaller's eager gaze, and rising she averted her head, colouring still more profoundly, and murmuring some shame-struck and yet passionate and consenting tones, rather than words, extended her hand, which he pressed not only to his lips but to his breast repeatedly.

The departure of Lucrezia with the pontiff and the usual attendants on their persons was the signal for dissolving the court; and Cæsar himself accompanied the Orsini to their retinue. It was observed by the gendarmes of the court that, not content with this mark of honour, he invited Le Beaufort, their known intermedio, to accompany him to his palace.

Alfonso, meanwhile, retired to his apartment; and Bembo, who rapidly followed, and who, contrary to his custom, had kept himself as much as possible of late in the shade, found him pacing it in great agitation.

The canon somewhat falteringly congratulated him on his influx of favour with Donna Lucrezia; but the prince interrupted him with so vehement a diatribe against her, in which he spared not to apply the most opprobrious designations appropriated to the sex, like those of rascal and villain by the stronger one, that Bembo stared in surprise and alarm. But his own virtuous indignation was kindled almost equally when Alfonso communicated his discovery of the intrigue with Sir Reginald, and belief that on the *encouragement* (that was his word) which he had purposely extended to her, her unbounded profligacy had already changed object, and reverted to her original designs on himself. But the canon had yet to hear, with unbounded astonishment, the adventure of the catacombs, and the discovery rendered in vain by the prior one; and he was seldom more eloquent than in the epithets with which he branded this extraordinary and unbounded license; and he responded with the utmost alacrity to his lord's commands to

have all things ready for his abrupt and secret departure on the following day.

The agitation of the prince was not diminished by its vehement outbursts; and when the evening darkened in, and he was left alone in obedience to his command, any one who had watched him might have imagined they beheld a man condemned to some dreadful doom, and awaiting it in the utmost perturbation. But he was not destined to the solitude he desired. An attendant announced a messenger from Lombardy, who desired to communicate certain news of which he was the bearer; and ere he could refuse or assent, the man himself stepped into the chamber. Scarcely glancing up in his agitation, Alfonso dismissed the page, and desired the Lombard to deliver his tidings; when suddenly stepping towards him, and removing his broad cap and a false beard of great length, the messenger presented the apparition of Paolo Orsino!

"Signor Orsino!—and here?" exclaimed the knight, scarcely for the instant believing in the evidence of his own eyes.

"Yea, and on an errand which touches your life, Knight of St. John!" returned Paolo, controlling his voice with difficulty into some calmness. "Partly to you I owe mine own, and partly now I retaliate the gift, since existence is misery. Leave this murderous palace and city with what speed you may, since even such an enemy as the Duke of Romagna has sworn your destruction, and but delays the stroke because he confides the vengeance to me, whom thou hast chiefly wronged."

"To-morrow, at this hour, I trust to be out of the shadow of the walls of Rome; but until then I cannot, and I will not, depart unless I see better reason than a vague threat or warning like this, my lord," replied Alfonso.

"To return within what space,—to bear your sovereign his fair spouse, with whom to-night you quaffed a precious elixir of love to weld your compact more infrangibly?" returned Paolo, bitterly smiling with the calm of excess of passion.

"What fair spouse is this?—Elixir of love!—signor, you rave!" said the Hospitaller.

"A treachery which should bring down the lightnings—wherefore should it not absolve my hand to avenge it?" muttered Paolo darkly. "But no! my life is thy debtor!—but I warn thee; thy treachery is known to me, thy rival and hater—and shall soon be to thy masters and the sudden pontiff himself."

"I freely acquit you of all restraint, Orsino, conditioning that you explain these strange words," said Alfonso, sternly, and yet his features flushed.

"Ha! and demand it with so bold a front that would abash the accusing angel himself!" exclaimed Paolo, wildly. "Answer me, unblenching innocence! art thou not here in Rome the secret envoy of the Dukes of Ferrara, to win their son his bride, and yet this very night, perchance!—Patience, patience, let us not go mad!—But hear me! I tell thee, the philtre which Lucrezia shared with thee to cement your guilty love, has betrayed it! ay, and to Cæsar, who demanded but the certainty to crush thee into

dust. The hags who sold your lady-love her charm are but his instruments—Notte and Morta!"

"An elixir in the draught I drained!—Methought, indeed, that a subtle fire—but Cæsar!—was it poison, then? Yet it cannot be, since she drank deeply of it—so deeply that I marvelled!—an elixir of love?"

"So deemed she—that, shared, it would make your mutual passion eternal!" returned Paolo. "But there was no other elixir nor poison in it than the lips of so beauteous a serpent must leave. Be well assured there was no traitor-bane in it,—for it was known by those who mixed it that she meant to share the draught."

"And sharing it so amply—she meant, certes, to partake my doom if aught of evil were in it!" exclaimed Alfonso. "But, no, no! she suspected your artifice, and intended effectually to deceive ye; or if, indeed, she sought with a hellish charm, matchlessly depraved and perfidious harlot! this indeed shall steel my heart to the fitting chastisement of thy vileness! By heaven, if she had remained faithful, even to her falsehood, it had not stirred my soul to so utter a loathing and contempt. But to your heavy charge, noble Orsino, I answer what your Reginald, too, must avouch—that I am even the absolute contrary of an envoy to win the Prince of Ferrara a bride in Lucrezia Borgia."

"Le Beaufort hath indeed oft averred it to me—nay, that you sought proofs against her to justify your prince's refusal to wed with her," replied the Orsino. "But he was deceived too! Cæsar himself

revealed to me your secret errand, which he discovered by chance; and deny if thou canst that in this evening's conference, Lucrezia commanded you, in her sire's name, showing thereby her own assent, to make your embassy public in to-morrow's audience."

"I deny it not, and confess, moreover, that but for what followed I had been amazed at the confidence in my submission with which she made it—for both herself and Cæsar know the true purpose of my embassy—which is what I have alleged," replied the Hospitaller. "Lend me a patient ear, and I will expound this mystery to you; and let the whole course of my demeanour confirm what I declare."

It had now become a matter of infinite consequence to the Prince of Ferrara to sever the dangerous union of the Borgias and Orsini, but it was not without a lingering hesitation that he related his adventure of the valley of Egeria, which tallied so closely with the Orsino's recollections that he could scarcely entertain a doubt of the truth of the statement.

"Why, then, he hath fooled me all and ever! It was upon that very night that Cæsar declared to me his discovery of your embassy," he exclaimed, wildly. "But, no, it was not in humanity to resist the allurements which thou feignest were offered to thee."

"I tell thee Cæsar was present;—but thou knowest not all his monstrous turpitude!" said the Hospitaller, with a natural shudder. "Remember

all that followed, and thou canst not doubt my truth;—the Jewesses—the tournament! Wherefore she betrayed me not I cannot dream, unless to keep your fears turned from another. Yet will I not belie her to confirm my tale, for all that I have learned acquits her of the dark accusations of which I came to gather proof. But one hath been too fatally proved; and rather with my will shall the earth be heaped on the last of the great line of Este, than its bright honour be lost in a harlot's transmission."

"Look that thou prove she merits this foul blazonry, or—but if thou canst prove it!—Knight of Ferrara, the Ursine blood was noble and Roman ere the barbarian Guelf crossed the Alps!" said Paolo, ravingly. "Prove it, I say! Speak out, then; of what dost thou accuse Lucrezia Borgia?"

"Ask it of Sir Reginald!—Bid him tell you whither he followed her female Pandarus, Faustina, last night—and where and how he spent it?" replied Alfonso, whitening at his own words.

"He spent it abroad, indeed, and gave but staggering answers to my jests!" exclaimed the Orsino, gasping for breath. "But thou wilt not say—thou canst not!—speak, or let my bursting heart out with thy dagger!"

"Recall all their conduct—Lucrezia's preference and open coquetry—and ask me no more, when I tell you that—detecting him at secret rendezvous in the palace—he confessed that he was summoned to a private audience with Lucrezia on your affairs."

"'Tis false!—'tis utterly false!—all was at an end

—none knew it better than he!" exclaimed Paolo. "On that very day the traitor declared to me his resolve of parting from Rome to return to his native land—hath of late oft cradled me with such assurances—and I thought I but prevailed upon him to stay by declaring all my projects, and the incalculable service he might be to me in foiling Cæsar's."

"Why, then, beware lest he hath not betrayed all your plans to his leman, for I swear by the blessed cross I have in nowise belied him!" replied Alfonso, his indignation boiling over at this perfidy. "Nay, more, if thou wilt listen;" and he related his surprisal of Le Beaufort in the avowal of his passion, in the labyrinth of the Minotaur.

"How came I so little to suspect him, and always thee?" exclaimed the Orsino, bewilderedly, yielding to this torrent of testimony. "Yet he himself did ever seem to have fears of thee. Oh, that I had never known the curse of consciousness! Le Beaufort! the friend whom I cherished in my heart's core! —Only Lucrezia could have made a villain so black of one whom nature meant for honesty. But all that thou sayest may be but cozenage. What proof have I but 'tis thou betrayest me?"

"Wherefore should I cozen thee with words?—I have but to raise my voice, and thou art a prisoner, in the power of thy worst foes, for where are thy friends and swordsmen now?" replied Alfonso. "But what if I proclaim and brand her openly, wilt thou still resolve to wed the ancient glories of thy name with her dishonour, if himself cannot refute nor deny my accusation?"

"Do men indeed believe my madness is so base?" exclaimed the Orsino. "I did but project to await your offer, and the pontiff's acceptance, to-morrow, to proclaim their perfidy, quit Rome, and by a great stroke restore the heart to our confederacy, which, unless I am betrayed—ay, and Reginald lingered with the Borgia!"

"If it be so thou shalt share with me a draught of vengeance whose fulness shall nigh cloy us both," said Alfonso, his eyes sparkling with the fury of his thoughts. "Truly I do believe that in the dangerous state of the Borgian fortunes—and for that she may have heard her young barbarian is a bosom-guest in Ferrara—or merely to strike fear into your confederacy—she thinks by mingling terror with cajolery to make me false to my masters' trust, and use the powers they confided in me, if I could establish her innocence, to offer their alliance. Wherefore she desired to speak with me in private on the matter; and when I dared to request, murmuring something of espial, that it might be by night and alone, she answered with assent, and a promise to send Faustina to guide me to her audience, at an hour when we need fear no observation!"

"Ay, it was then, with that blush, and that glance of fire!" muttered the Orsino, slowly recovering from the shock of this announcement as if from a thunder stroke. "And thou wilt go.—But what matters it to me?"

"Yea, I will go.—To satisfy mine own sense of her vileness, for all things else may deceive," returned Alfonso. "But gaze not thus wildly at me! I swear

to thee, by all my hopes of salvation, I go but to fill up the measure of the scorn and detestation which I have ever meted to her—to repulse her, the woman, the beauty, the Borgia! even when she has debased herself to this lowest and last degradation to win me, when she imagines herself on the brink of triumph, for therefore did I seem to yield to her spells to-day —leaving the perpetual memory of my scorn twined like a serpent in her heart-strings!"

A wild discordant laugh from the Orsino interrupted him, which he broke short abruptly in the middle of the peal. "But dost thou truly think that, alone of all mankind, thou hast this superhuman constancy?" he exclaimed. "Or inflicting so grievous an insult on a woman and a Borgia, dost thou in reality hope to leave Rome alive?"

"With such a secret in my power, what dares she do?—And I have been essayed," returned Alfonso, flushing deeply. "And moreover, she has deceived her sire, and dares not accuse me. At worst she will spare me until the audience to-morrow;—and now I speak of vengeance! If thou wilt promise me the shelter and protection of thy power to leave this palace and Rome, I will therein publicly declare my real embassy—declare that it is accomplished by my discovery of her profuse preference of the Knight of England;—and thereby shall I indissolubly knit into your alliance the powerful princes of Ferrara."

"Give me this vengeance, and take all things else that are mine—life itself!" exclaimed the Orsino, frantic with the violence of his passions. "And that

thy lords may not accuse thee of precipitation, learn what were the projects of the Borgias on their states."

And without pausing in his vehemence, the Orsino revealed the conspiracy against Ferrara, into which Cæsar had cajoled him by his perjuries, to one who, though he knew it not, was the most interested of all men in the discovery. The tidings confirmed Alfonso in the expediency of producing an open rupture among his enemies, since all hope of the alliance was at an end; and he renewed his engagement and strengthened his revelations with so many additional proofs, that all doubt was removed from Paolo's mind. He knew, moreover, that the envoy could not otherwise hope to escape Cæsar's vengeance after the discovery by the philtre; and they parted under a mutual oath to perform their parts in the compact to the utmost.

CHAPTER IX.

" Yet therewithal this warning word he joined ;
' Strains such as these befit not baser ear :
To carles, to faitours, to unfolden clear,
Love's mystic lore doth much that love profane ;
To clerks, to knights, to melting damsels dear,
Yet more to all who weep for others' pain,
Love's lessons and delights do chiefly appertain.' "
Fabliau of the XIIth Century.—LEGRAND, *by* WAY.

IT was verging towards midnight when the Knight of St. John found himself seated alone in an apartment of Lucrezia's suite, whither he was guided by Mona Faustina, mumbling confusedly against the policies which kept her nursling from her pillow; and who then retired to announce his arrival.

It needed all the indignation which his recollections could rekindle to support the Hospitaller in the resolves he had formed, and to prevent the inflow of very contrary thoughts and feelings when he was left to his anticipations of the approaching interview. He was in a chamber of that ineffable species which would now be styled a boudoir, but was called in the palace Capriccio Madama. The Borgian love and luxury had exhausted themselves in the decora-

tions of this sanctuary of their gorgeous ornament, and it seemed rather a work of fairy than of human art. The walls were painted in the richest arabesque, mingling the most splendid colours with forms of marvellous beauty and grace, linked in inextricable twinings, and apparently uniting all the scattered colours and glories of the universe into one boundless profusion of magnificence. The couch of pale pink velvet on which Alfonso seated himself was perfumed with some sweet essence; and the whole air was aromatic with the scents fanning in from the flowery terraces of the Vatican below the windows. The only light, save that of a broad and effulgent moon, which the silken hangings but dimly shaded out, was showered from a marble group of great beauty, representing Psyche discovering Cupid. All around were the implements of female occupation, or evidence of the refined amusements in which Lucrezia delighted—the gilded distaff, rich embroidery, instruments of music, and manuscripts prepared for so illustrious a perusal, with various and most beautiful blazonries. The languid sweetness of the hour joined in conspiracy against the Hospitaller; the musical murmur of the distant fountains mingled with the notes of innumerable nightingales; the dreamy brightness of the moonlight; the soft mysterious whisperings of the leaves in the gentle air—touched subtle chords of love and pleasure in his breast. But even with these warring impulses at work, his regret and anguish and wrath seemed every instant to grow more wildly intense, until in his agony he felt prompted to a vengeance more

terrible than that he had as yet meditated; as if he could without hesitation yield himself up to any doom, however torturous, to relieve himself of the jealousy which ate with its poisoned fangs into his soul, and tear Lucrezia's beauty for ever out of the arms of his blest rival, even by hurling her into those of death. This black thought was vaguely whirling in his disordered fancy, when a door opened, and the lady of the Borgias, attended by Mona Faustina, made her appearance.

Alfonso had expected to behold her flushed with the triumph of her licentious arts, arrayed to dazzle and subdue; but he had not armed himself against the more seductive modesty of her white and totally unornamented garb, the paleness of her beautiful visage slowly tinted with a very faint rosiness when she felt how his gaze was fixed upon her, though the eyes which he expected to meet glowing with licentious fire were never once raised, and tears had evidently but lately hung upon their long lashes. But her voice trembled with some consciousness, when, interrupting his confused and strangely humbled salutation, with a gesture which was at once dignified and agitated, she commanded Mona Faustina to retire, and give the envoy of Ferrara full latitude in declaring his master's will.

With a smile which evinced no great degree of goodwill to the knight, but in truth with something in it of malignancy and scorn, the nurse obeyed, leaving the doors open after her, as if purposely, and revealing a vista of still more mysterious and recondite chambers—the next being that in which Alfonso

had formerly noticed the alcove hung with gold-coloured satin, and the ceiling painted with Aurora meeting Night. His gaze then reverted in a tumult of passions which almost deprived him of his senses to Lucrezia—and he found that she seemed only intent on watching the figure of her duenna to a remote antechamber, in which her lamp and herself disappeared.

"My guard sleep beyond," she then said, with something significant in her tone, but not without confusion. "Mona Faustina will wait to prevent any alarm which the unusual hour of this audience—but I pray you, signor, be seated."

She motioned to the Hospitaller to take a chair at a considerable distance from a low couch of white velvet wrought with roses which she herself assumed, with the manner indeed of a queen about to hear some suppliant, rather than of a woman who had granted so dangerous a condescension to a lover. The Hospitaller, however, recovering from his first surprise, only thanked the lady with a deep bend, but still preserved his station at a much less distance than that indicated.

There were several moments of utter and most embarrassing silence, and but that his jealous thoughts suggested torturing causes, Alfonso could not but have been moved with the expression of dejection and subdued agitation which her whole look and attitude revealed. As it was, he dared not trust his voice to speak; and it was Lucrezia whose musical and tremulous tones at length broke the silence.

"Knight, you demanded that your audience should

be secret ——" she said, pausing with visible embarrassment, and then suddenly resuming with firmness and haughtiness. "And if I have granted it—'tis because, knowing that your real motive and embassy from the princes of Ferrara is the very reverse of that which his paternity believes and desires to hear declared by you to-morrow—and remembering that I owe my life to you—I would repay the gift by requesting your acceptance of the means of immediate flight, which I have prepared and place at your command."

Deeply touched as he was by this seemingly generous concern for his safety, the jealous suggestions which his fancy instantly mingled supported Alfonso in the vengeful part which he had planned to enact.

"Even the revolted angels were not expelled from paradise so suddenly, lady; and such your presence makes Rome, and this chamber, its divinest bower!" he replied in a low wooing tone, indescribably sweet to the sense that listened. "Neither were they condemned unheard;—and by whom am I accused to justify a punishment as severe as theirs?"

"Your once friend, the ballerina, has avowed all that passed between ye—are you not therein answered?" returned the lady, with rapidity.

"But it was my evil hap to offend in rejecting her tenderness, and may she not have belied or exaggerated my fault to your grace?" said the Hospitaller, fixing his burning gaze on the lady, for the recollections of the Egerian cave rushed overpoweringly back upon him.

"You own then, sir envoy, that it was a fault to believe so evilly of me?" she replied, with a most eager and inquiring glance, which she reverted instantly with confusion on meeting that of Alfonso.

"Again I demand my accusation, lady," he said, cruelly enjoying the pangs which his question was likely to rekindle in her breast.

"Nay, nay, I will be plain with you," she returned, with a touch of strong indignation in her tones. "I do not—I cannot—it is impossible for me to doubt the ballerina's report."

"The ballerina!—wherefore, alas! is she so much the enemy of one who, despite all reason to the contrary, dotes even on the shadowy sweetness of her remembrance, and must for ever, if any power of the soul rests unchanged throughout its immortality!" he returned with a warmth and sincerity of passion not to be doubted; and it almost seemed as if Lucrezia were jealous of her own rivalry, for she replied with precipitation—"Nay, she is not thine enemy—nay, she hath not belied thee; and, knight, thou wilt not dare to plead so, when I tell thee the ballerina was Lucrezia Borgia!"

"Most exquisite loveliness! and I knew it!" exclaimed Alfonso, almost vanquished when he marked the deep blush of recollection which instantly dyed her visage, while all she had avowed in her precipitation recurred to her. Her only resource was anger, and that she took.

"Why, then, how daredst thou to question me—me—myself?—how darest thou even here? If I

were the tigress thou wouldst have had me proved, how darest thou stand before Lucrezia Borgia and avouch thy calumnies?" she said with vehemence.

"On my lips, lady, still lurks the ravening fire the ballerina left there!—how could I fear that I was mortal, surviving the rapture of that instant?" he said, in tones which vibrated through the enamoured soul of the beauteous Borgia, though shame and anger only sparkled in her expression, as she replied, "Ah, even now you flatter like fear! But you misdoubted your mortality when you told the nun of the Agonizants that Lucrezia Borgia had attempted your life with poison! Oh, our Lady, your life!"

"And shall I say the gentle nun belied me, too?—or more truly confess—and to herself—that I belied the gentle nun?" said Alfonso, drawing somewhat nearer; but an impatient gesture from the lady admonished him to remain where he was.

"And yet—with all these proofs—but it matters not. Return to thy harsh north, and save thyself from my father's anger—for that is deadly," she replied, shuddering, and yet with evident hesitation.

"Why should I dread your father's wrath, lady, when, with these proofs indeed, and many others which my toilsome ventures have attained, I have established your innocence of all the charges which the ballerina wept to hear?" he replied. "Then, wherefore should I fly—wherefore should I not fulfil my sovereign's commission, and demand you as his bride before the world?"

"And I will answer you!" returned Lucrezia with vivacity. "The pride of the princes of Ferrara is, it

seems, great, and I hear you will not expose them to the mortification of a refusal—which, by yonder most blessed image of our Lady of Tears! awaits your embassy from me, if after this warning you dare to utter it."

She pointed somewhat forgetfully at a silver image of the Virgin over the alcove in the adjoining chamber; and the Hospitaller's first surprise was followed by an influx of jealous suspicion.

"Certes, madama, you have sworn the rejection of this great alliance to some one who hath more sway over you than policy or ambition may claim;—ay, and perchance by the same holy and upgazing form!" he said, with wrathful vehemence. "For my lord's questionings and doubts thus fairly ending and resolved cannot alone have moved you to this anger."

"Nay, rather, I honour him for his princely refusal to mate with dishonour!" she replied with enthusiasm. "But you have shown yourself too jealous of his happiness and renown for me to doubt your answer when I ask you if you deem he could content him with the casket of a love—the jewel gone."

"How says your grace!—that you love another?" exclaimed the Hospitaller, now fairly yielding to his agitation, and adding in a voice full of anguish and bitterness, "Fool that I was!—Oh, I dreamed that you loved, lady!—yet—not thus, not thus—when from my concealment in the grotto of Egeria I watched you awaiting the arrival of one—in whose stead came the Duke of Romagna."

"Thou!—thou didst behold me, then?" ejaculated Lucrezia, hiding her face in her hands with excess of shame, and murmuring in the most dove-like tones of her sweet voice, "Yes! I loved once—then! But love barters his wares, not sells them: 'tis all over now!"

"And if love barters—love me with the love of all thy sex, as I love thee with—nay, to infinitely beyond—all the love of mine!" said Alfonso, sinking in a delirium of passion at her feet. "Lucrezia! thou rapt perfection of all the divinity of woman!—'tis thou hast belied me, that never from the instant I first beheld thy beauty have ceased to worship thee! to love thee dearer than my life, ay, even when I thought thou hadst attempted it and my honour together, when I deemed thee a marvel of wickedness that wert only one of goodness and loveliness."

"Knight, dost thou forget? Yes, yes, I loved thee once; but now thou wrongest me more bitterly than my worst calumniator, to deem I loved the man, and not the hero! for betraying thus thy master and lord—how can I love thee longer?" she said, tearing her hand with vehemence from the kisses with which he covered it, and for a moment her countenance wore an expression of disdain and indignation, which suddenly melted away in a shower of tears. "I cannot do it!" she exclaimed, in vain attempting to staunch the flow. "Knight, I will confess to thee all! It was my purpose to cajole thee into this wild outburst, that I might taste the luxury which we Borgias are said to find in revenge, and repel your passion with scorn; heap on you the

remorse of having violated your faith, and the white purity of honour you had preserved untainted, to my scorn! But no, it is not so; an accursed philtre, administered in the draught wherewith I pledged you, works in your veins! Leave me!—fly!—thou seest I am as evil as thou canst deem me."

Vehemently as this most generous avowal smote the conscience and heart of the Hospitaller, the very beauty of the confusion and tenderness with which she made it raised his regrets, and revenge, and jealousy, and love, in a whirlwind which threatened to sweep away every restraint.

"There is no philtre—albeit my veins flow only fire—but thy divinest and most subtle spells of beauty at work in my soul!" he said with frenzied fervour. "Cæsar himself sent to thee the hags, Notte and Morta, that he might set murderous jealousies upon me, and discover truly whom thou didst love. But it seems it was a fallacy; and thou didst pledge me but to make thyself a mirth and mockery of my madness!"

"Not so, not so!—leave me, and I will swear to thee by any oath which to break is perdition—that I have loved but once, and thee!" wept Lucrezia, sinking her fair face in her agony of shame and fear like a rose too heavily laden with dew.

"Nay, then, if thou lovest me! If thou lovest me!—and parting thus for ever!—I will return that kiss whose poison lurks like madness in my blood!" said the Hospitaller wildly—and Lucrezia started up from him in terror, with difficulty eluding his frantic embrace.

"I love thee!—in very truth I love thee!—but do not frighten me!" she exclaimed, finding herself as instantly entangled in his arms. "Forgive me but this once. Indeed I have not wronged thee, for I have confessed my wicked sorceries!—Swear then to leave me on the instant, and give me back my madness if thou wilt—that therein all may be as it had never been!"

"Sorceress! fiend!—for then I were lost!—no, no, begone, begone! Be not false at least to thy falsehood! Those lips still burn with pressings to which mine would seem too cold!" exclaimed the Knight of St. John, almost flinging her from the embrace to which she was yielding in mingled fear and tenderness. "Leave thee!—yea, and for ever, to find a fitter successor for Reginald le Beaufort, when thou hast had more time to be aweary of him!"

"Successor!—Sir Reginald le Beaufort!" repeated Lucrezia, almost unconscious for the instant with unutterable shame and amazement.

"No, no! thou shalt not wreathe me to perdition, thou fairest serpent!" he continued, desperately. "Thy plot was mine, too; to lure thee to this yielding that I might tell thee how I loathe and spurn thy harlot love, and defy its most bewildering temptations!"

"Temptations!—I!—successor!" repeated Lucrezia, vacantly; and then as if consciousness had slowly returned upon her, she said in a voice of supernatural calmness, and yet with a wild derisive laugh of anguish, "Thou hast not noted then, good knight, that—albeit out of hearing—Mona Faustina is in

sight?" and without turning, she indicated with a gesture the ancient nurse, who was indeed visible at the end of the vista of apartments, affecting to nod in an easy chair, but looking towards them.

"This is but thy masterpiece of craft, perfidious woman!" said Alfonso, but indeed infinitely staggered. "Thou dreamest with thy false denials and chaste seemings to lure me into mating the bright and unstained honours of Este with thine infamy!"

"And dost thou feign still to disbelieve in my innocence, most unjust and cruel of men?" exclaimed Lucrezia, with an indignation and fury which seemed at length to have overpowered all the gentler passions in her Borgian blood.

"Innocence!—Why then my own sense cheated me, when I heard the false Knight of England declare his love, unblamed and unreproved, in the labyrinth of the Minotaur!" he replied. "Deemest thou that I was blind not to note your warmth before—your dotage after? Ha, and Bembo—Bembo that was ever your unwearied advocate—Bembo reported how ye met! But that is little—Oh, that is little!—ask thine own heart, vilest as thou art loveliest of thy treacherous sex! what I would say,—for words would choke me!"

"Sir Reginald!—Oh, thou but speakest of him!" returned Lucrezia, with a singular and wild joy breaking through the thunder-cloud of passions which shadowed her visage. "Nay, then, I will leave thee no corner of evasion. When thou recallest all thy harshness to one who loved thee, and for that cause, thou shalt not cheat thy remorse with any

other pretext, and say 'twas for this or this. It is wrung from my soul, a woman's soul, mark me, knight!—ay, even were I the woman thou wouldst prove me, to justify thy most unchristian abhorrence, which hath no drop of pity in all its depths!—I loved thee; I have avowed it, from the instant thy first glance of lofty pride and scorn fell upon me; and the terror which thy harsh and implacable character struck ever in my soul but farther subjected its slavish female nature, which I could weep to remember, but that it would rejoice thee to see my weakness!—I will not shed a single tear, but I will tell thee, knight!—Oh, if it was a woman's artifice to deem by jealousy to kindle into fire the spark of love thou didst confess had fallen into that cold heart of thine, blame nature that made me one!—Thou heardst the poor youth's avowal of his love, whereto I had led him beyond mine intent, which was but to flaunt thee with his presence—but tarried not my sharp repulse, nor his remorseful atonement, for nobly did his generous and high nature struggle ever till then against my cruel artifices;—cruel indeed, but bitterly hath the cup I held been returned to my own lips!"

"A well-devised legend; your grace is an improvisatrice of known skill," said Alfonso. "But wherefore, when there was no doting rival to be fooled, was it necessary to receive the northman with such ecstasies as one worth the credence reports?"

"Dost think I have not learned some pity from mine own suffering; that remorse, indeed, can find no entry in my soul; that no feeling burned

there when I heard the tale of the paramour of Sultan Zem?" said Lucrezia, shrinking timidly from the increasing violence of the Hospitaller's look and manner. "And why should I veil the horror familiar to thy knowledge as to mine? Cæsar was present. What if it was the artifice of the silly dove to flutter round the bush where her nest is not? And, moreover, the canon himself—alack, but I must smile—I had found but too much occasion to reprove the demonstrations of his own liking, not to deem that he has exaggerated in his report of my favour to another!"

"Indeed, indeed!—but being all compounded of sorceries, how shall I blame him?" raved the knight. "This is good talk! But what convincing falsehood hast thou to excuse Sir Reginald's presence here,—his secret interview with thee last night, in these very chambers, with only these wanton stars, and the upturned eyes of thy Madonna, and the heavy lids of Mona Faustina, for witnesses?"

"Here—in these chambers—last night! which of us is mad?" said Lucrezia, turning very pale.

"Ay, wouldst thou have circumstance? Then listen, and I will overwhelm even the customary assurance of thy trade," said Alfonso, clutching her hand and holding it violently, as she turned as if meditating flight in her alarm; and with inconceivable rapidity, and yet with perfect clearness, he related his adventure of the previous night with Sir Reginald.

"And can it be—my old nurse, too, betray me!" exclaimed Lucrezia, with a sudden torrent of tears.

"But it cannot be!—the noble English knight would not thus belie me, or if to vex thee—if fearing thine errand.—But no, but no! it is thou, who, finding no other calumny left to blacken me withal, hast invented this to please thy barbarous lords."

"Nay, if thou hast no prettier-coloured legend than this—this cannot dazzle us out of our sight," returned Alfonso, with bitter scorn, releasing her hand, and folding his arms, as if he had reached a conclusion in which to rest.

"Ah, then indeed my cruel sport is fairly retaliated—or he too is the victim of some black deceit," exclaimed the lady, gazing at the incontrovertible signs of agony visible in Alfonso's features. But laughing sardonically and with utter scorn, he bowed deeply as if dismissed, and made a retrograde step.

"Why then—either thou feignest, or thou shalt believe in me!" she exclaimed, darting forward and in turn detaining him by the hilt of his sword. "How might this be, harsh man! sithence I spent the hours of which you accuse me—not in these chambers—not in this palace—not with Sir Reginald—but with thee, in the catacombs of San Sebastian, playing a dire part in that dire scene, where thou too—if thine hardness were to be convinced even by supernatural assurance—heardst the full confirmation of mine innocence!"

Alfonso could only gaze at the speaker in utter and overwhelming amazement.

"I will not leave thee any pretext of doubt," she continued, with torrent-like vehemence. "It was when I was weeping in my loneliness over thine

imagined preference of the sultan's paramour, and the threats and inextricable terrors that environed me—when one implored an audience of me—they told me a woful suppliant from Capua; and, for thou knowest that I am stern and merciless in all my dealings, but that I rejoice ever to witness calamity, I had not granted audience to the daughter of the Colonnas—for she it was! Ah, then indeed, listening to her wrongs and sufferings, did I comprehend what humanity can endure, and yet its outward framework yield not. She related all her wrongs, thy generosity, that direful confidence which she exchanged, Cæsar's long calumnies against me, his hideous crimes—but those had long haunted me with shadows like certainties,—the part she had played in the carnival, at his command, to support with visible facts the taints upon my name! Alack, she is a wild and fearful thing, acquainted with strange secrets, perchance supernatural, and gifted with the mastery of mind. Something she spoke of proving mine innocence — of a just vengeance on Cæsar—of removing thy suspicions, and thereby to attain for me thy master's ducal crown. But, believe me, there was but one motive which gave me the courage to obey her—to do and dare what I have done and dared—and that—that could not be a woman's longing for the gauds of sovereignty, since —and all misery catch me if it be not so, even thy deeper hate!—since, unless the impossible can be, unless *thou* wert Alfonso of Ferrara — force nor prayers should ever make me share his crown, were it imperial!"

"Why this is as marvellous as the rest! But tell out thy tale, lest the dream should vanish ere I can list its comfort to some credibility," said Alfonso, breathlessly.

"I know not with what bribes Fiamma had gained a wizard to her purposes in whom Cæsar trusts," she continued rapidly. "But thou wert to be present, and the frenzy of my despair and indignation, and hope to check the violent career of the fiend men call my brother, and Fiamma's words of fire, gave me courage for all things. Sorcery was perchance in it — nay, 'tis certain — albeit she wrought with strange mirrors, and the gracious portrait of my lost Francesco which was in this chamber ever until then. Yet it was Cæsar's jealous fears which chose the depths of the catacombs for the unhallowed mystery, familiar to her and to Dom Sabbat, and all those whose science needs darkness and terrific silence and shelter from the espial of humanity. No, no, all holy saints be praised! his gentle spirit was not troubled in its repose, since when the unearthly shadow was raised, despite the fears which nigh overwhelmed me, she was compelled to place me there to imitate his voice, and speak the words which Cæsar scorned, even believing that the grave opened its earthy mouth and spoke. O, heaven and Francesco, pardon, if the work was as unholy and unblest as in the delirium of my thoughts I dreamed it holy and helpful then!"

"Let me not wake from this dream, unless to die!" exclaimed the Hospitaller, incredulous with the very excess of the triumph and joy which

rushed in full tide over his soul. "Lucrezia! my own! my all! and when thou badst him wed thee where thyself shouldst deign to choose, tell me—didst thou then think of me?"

"Knight of St. John! that were, I knew, impossible!—I sought but to deliver myself for ever from all wearying of the kind, living out my days for thy sake in unloved solitude," she replied.

There was a moment's struggle in Alfonso's breast, but his unquiet and too craving spirit, and the bewildering influence, perchance, of a now unresisted passion, brought strange words to his lips.

"Thou lovest me!—I worship thee!—It is in my power, thou knowest, thou ecstasy of beauty! Be mine, and by all that men hold dear or sacred thou shalt also be the wife of Alfonso of Este!"

"Out and alas! and hast thou cast the divine mask, and art a devil too?" exclaimed Lucrezia, repulsing him with the fiercest scorn. "Traitor! I spurn thee! and these words have broken a spell which honour and pride and every outraged feeling of my heart could not! Leave me for ever, and on the instant, or thy wronged lord shall know what manner of ambassador the end proves thee!"

"Say what thou wilt against me to Alfonso, still he will love me dearly as himself, and thee many a myriad more!" returned the Hospitaller, all his scruples and jealousies utterly dissipated; "miracle of thy sex! for I am he!"

Lucrezia gazed at him as if she feared he was struck with sudden madness; but in an instant the

certainty flashed over her, in the rapid arrangement of all the strange inconsistencies of his conduct which rushed upon her recollection. Yet, instead of any utterance of joy, she grew instantly quite colourless, and but that Alfonso clasped and supported her as she sunk on the couch, she must have fallen to the ground.

"Ah! now indeed, Fra Bruno, Heaven's vengeance lights on my share in the guilty blood of our house!" she said, in a low, fear-struck tone. "I had taught my soul patience in the impossibility which I imagined ever to be honourably thine, and now!—O! thou knowest not there is a curse denounced on all whom my love approaches, and on mine own head, which Fra Bruno was miraculously loosened from his dungeon to declare to me."

"Fra Bruno!—loveliest, calm thy fears!—Fra Bruno is but an impostor, or at best a madman," he replied, with inexpressible satisfaction at finding the obstacle no mightier. "But didst thou not with thine own sweet eyes behold that the necromancer Sabbat and he are one, which Cæsar revealed when his jealousy choked life awhile in his veins, chance bringing me to their sight when they invoked some fiend to show to their hatred whom Lucrezia loved?"

But the Hospitaller now learned that Lucrezia had become senseless with the shriek which he had imagined the despairing phantom uttered, and was borne forth by Fiamma ere she had recovered full consciousness. The rest of the scene was therefore a new marvel to her; but not satisfied with his revelation of the identity of the monk and sorcerer,

Alfonso declared his suspicions of Fra Bruno's passion, revealing all his reasons against the unfortunate friar, rousing her indignation to the highest by relating his testimony as confessor against her; his attempt to prevent him from appearing in the tourney by administering some poisonous drug, and laying the blame upon her; and above all, by reminding her tenderly of the scene of the hermitage on Aventine—which restored the rich tints to Lucrezia's complexion, but left her no room for defence or doubt.

The mutual and now unreserved confidence of the lovers which followed—the bewildering rapture of their acknowledgments of love and interchange of oaths and promises unbounded—the comparison of their adventures and sufferings—the intermingled tears and smiles with which Lucrezia listened to the story of the knight's long struggles, and the dangerous subtleties he had practised to win light on his perplexities, we leave to the reader's imagining and recollection; but the full revelation entailed new terrors and perplexities on Lucrezia. Vehemently as her indignation was roused by the plan of the Orsino to overwhelm her with public disgrace, her fears were all concentrated on Cæsar. It was not probable, indeed, that Faustina would betray their interview to Cæsar, inasmuch as she had consented to it against all his designs and policy, and with the belief that her lady purposed to use it in cajoling the emissary of Ferrara into using the powers confided to him to withdraw herself and nursling out of Cæsar's reach. It might be she was weary, or

troubled in conscience at the treacherous part she had played, and desired to escape from the entanglement; but still it was possible that she might find it judicious to betray them, and she had for some time exhibited symptoms of impatience at the length of the interview, which Lucrezia had noticed, though unheeded by her lover. Moreover, Cæsar might have his suspicions roused by the discovery of the monk. Fiamma was, however, out of danger, for in parting she had declared to Lucrezia that, being satisfied of Cæsar's guilt, she intended to leave Rome for ever; and desired that no inquiry should be made for her until she sent word that she was in safety.

But Lucrezia would not listen to her lover's bold project of revealing Cæsar's crimes to the pontiff. She declared that the discovery would in all probability completely overwhelm him in the tempestuous fury of the passions it would provoke, reminding Alfonso of the almost mortal violence of his grief on the tragical death of the Duke of Gandia. Neither had they any tangible proofs to allege; and it was very possible that Cæsar would be driven to desperation, and his secret influence and open power, and the resources of his ferocious genius, might produce some extraordinary and destructive explosion. The pontiff already mistrusted him, and the declaration of the Ferrara alliance would strike awe into the confederate barons, and prevent all necessity of confiding to him the powers which he was so likely to abuse. The only triumph which Lucrezia would permit her lover to enjoy was

the confusion of the Orsini and their secret ally, when on the following day he should, without warning or explanation, make the proposals from Ferrara public; after which her fears for his safety could only be satisfied by his solemn promise to depart secretly for Lombardy, thence to demand her in form, and make preparations to aid the pontiff, if assistance should be necessary. The desire which he passionately urged to reveal his name and rank, and wed her immediately, filled her with a terror which could only be appeased by this promise, and which the direful tragedies of so many victims of Cæsar's unnatural rivalry might well arouse. She would not even suffer that the pontiff should be made acquainted with the truth until he was beyond the reach of accident, alleging the innumerable and crafty spies with whom Alexander was surrounded, to whose scrutiny his impetuous passions and impulses continually laid him open. Moreover, Lucrezia wrung from her lover, as a proof that he had laid aside all jealousy, that he would leave the rebuking of Sir Reginald to herself, who she was satisfied had been deceived in some similar manner, by the treachery of Faustina, as he had himself been in the valley of Egeria. She related most touching tales of the young knight's honourable struggles with his passion, and of her own cruel use of it to misdirect suspicion, and even expressed her belief that in obeying Faustina's summons he had really hoped to have the resolution to plead for the Orsino; tales which might have moved Alfonso to pity; but the still uncalmed heavings of his jealousy, and the delirium of passion,

suggested an ungenerous advantage to be gained by compliance with those gentle entreaties.

It might be that the lady guessed at the nature of her lover's thoughts, which his tremulous gestures and the fire in his eyes betrayed; for with the divine instinct of that natural modesty of the sex which is scarcely ever obliterated, even in the vilest of it, her own manner grew colder and more reserved. She laboured to change the discourse, sweet as was to her that rhapsody of burning eloquence in which Alfonso atoned for his long silence. But the apprehensions which dictated this change of demeanour were in themselves dangerously suggestive; his words became strangely vague and random, and yet he continued to gaze with a kind of fierceness at Lucrezia, while half in fear, and half in hope to divert his thoughts, she laboured to win from him an assurance that he would in nowise molest Le Beaufort.

"No, my Lucrezia! unless I have assurance on which my soul can rest secure, I dare not suffer aught to breathe that envies me my treasure!" he exclaimed. "Be mine wholly, and I take Heaven and earth to witness that thou art my bride, my wife, my soul, my essence, my infinity of love, all that I am and all that ever I can be! But be mine! and I will believe in thee against the angels!"

"Nay, now, indeed, thou provest, love, that thou dost not love me, but hatest and despisest me even to thy soul's core!" replied Lucrezia, weeping, and in a terrified manner endeavouring to release herself from the arm with which he circled her. But the very humility and supplication of her look, and

attitude of submissive entreaty, gave her beauty a more resistless charm than in its brightest blaze of power and victory.

"Fear not! thou art my wife, my Lucrezia, my existence! Fear not, my sweetness! I will but repay that gentle Egerian kiss, flimsy as lightning!"

"Swear then to leave me on the instant. Nay, till thou swearest, dearest Alfonso!—I am all thine, but do not debase thy wife to be the thing her foes have called her!" she exclaimed, and gliding from his embrace she sank on her knees before him, in an attitude of mingled fear and supplication.

"Thou!—kneeling whence I should never rise! Oh, they have belied thee, my Lucrezia, for I know thou lovest me! Yes, I swear it! But one instant to obliterate that churlish recollection of the valley of Egeria! But one farewell glimpse of heaven, and I will leave thee!" said Alfonso, rallying all the strength of his chivalrous and honourable spirit. And raising her with passionate tenderness, the Hospitaller pressed his soul with his lips on those whose sweetness had truly never left haunting his own, and certes with most ample retaliation, for it seemed as if the deep draught of passion could never be satiated with their crimson nectar. Loving so passionately, and of a nature so fraught with the glowing sun of her land, what marvel that Lucrezia, in the first movement of ecstatic tenderness, wreathed her fair arms round his neck, and met the pressure with almost equal fervour? Nay, and it might be that it was rather her knowledge of her lover's character, than motives which might actuate the purer and

colder daughters of the north, which almost simultaneously induced her to start from his arms, and touch a silver bell, which lay on the couch beside her, exclaiming "Faustina!" But already the duenna was in the chamber; and affecting to rub her eyes and yawn, she pointed to the casement, at which the first beams of dawn had for some time paled the moonlight. Both instantly assumed, though not very successfully, the cold and distant manner befitting their supposed relation; and satisfied that the ancient dame had overheard little of their conversation, since she assumed an air of infinite discretion and reproof towards her nursling, the envoy took a more sober farewell, and retired with one last, laughing, and yet most passionate glance of love, and pride, and gratitude, and playful mockery from his betrothed.

CHAPTER X.

"If this be triumph, what call ye defeat?"
Ilfracombe.

The Sala Regia was prepared for the festival in which was to be decided the dispute of the tournament of the Colosseum. Yet, festival as it might be, it was felt, though not acknowledged, that something of foreboding and gloom mingled with all the pomp and splendour of the scene. The guard on the pontifical palace was noted to be unusually numerous; and the musters of the Orsini, however speciously declared to be in honour of their young chieftain, were as significantly great.

The festival had certainly something of a military character, yet the pontiff was somewhat surprised, on entering the Sala, followed by Lucrezia and his court, to perceive that the majority of his guests were in armour. Paolo and Le Beaufort were armed at all points, excepting the head; and the former had an expression of wild gaiety on his pallid features contrasting in a very unwonted manner with the gloom in Le Beaufort's.

Paolo fixed his eyes eagerly on Lucrezia, hoping, no doubt, to feast them with traces of the suffering and degradation to which he believed she had been subjected in the Hospitaller's disdain. But his heart glowed as if with living fire when he saw her enter, her face beaming with delight and satisfaction, all her motions undulating as if to some inward music of enjoyment and happiness. But when the Hospitaller entered, for the first time arrayed in a rich court garb, which displayed the kingly grandeur of his person in a new light, his consternation was completed on discerning that, instead of the glances of ire which ought to have been exchanged, their eyes sought each other's and met in an electric shock, and Lucrezia's sparkled with a warmer lustre, and a mystic smile played like a butterfly over the deepening roses of her cheeks.

Messer Bembo followed his lord, but with a satisfactorily dismal expression; for, in some chastisement of the canon's platonism, Alfonso had informed him of the dangerous position in which he was likely to be placed, without hinting at his means of extrication.

A stately ceremonial was gone through, which finally left the three competitors standing before the elevated chair on which Lucrezia sat, as Queen of the Quest, surrounded by the fair jury who assisted, or at least confirmed her judgment.

It was the etiquette in these secular exhibitions to take no formal notice of the pontiff's presence. Lucrezia, therefore, commenced her address with only a gentle smile at her sire, and a bend to the assembly,

which was returned with deep homage; and though tinged with the rhetorical forms of the age, in any the harmony of her voice would have rendered it eloquent.

"Very dear ladies, and my lords," she began, after a slight pause; "the herald of our absolute court has informed you for what purpose we are here met, under our Lady's enlightenment, and by the rules of chivalry, to adjudge who hath deserved best of these very valiant knights. Women we are, indeed, and therefore by some may be deemed but little competent to weighty judgments. But nature, that denied us both strength and valour, gave us so deep an admiration of those qualities—rendered them so needful to us—that we are even like the lovers of arts, who, having neither prejudice nor rivalry, are oft better judges in them than the professors themselves. Moreover, we are artists in this, that women were those who wrought the rough ore of strength and valour into the glories of chivalry, melting it in the fire of love; refining it with generosity, humility, and all mercifulness; welding it in the ice-cold temper of chastity and forbearance; polishing it with tenderness, grace, honour, and courtesy—making it indeed but religion in panoply of steel. Yet be it as it may, we are women, and as women we must judge.

"Not only, therefore, ye are to learn, lords and valiant gentlemen, decide we on the valour, but on the worthiness of the deeds, and doers. Therefore the noble Lord Orsino will pardon us, that we cannot deem his share in the surprise of Capua eclipses

the merit of his rivals—a surprise that poured forth torrents of blood which might have been spared—the blood of women, too, and of the children of women! Yet there are no mothers among your judges, Lord Paolo!"

"Even so;—but they may chance to become so with but common luck, Lady Lucrezia!" interrupted the Orsino, in a voice of such sullen mockery, with so strong an emphasis on the name that there was a silence of utter astonishment in the audience.

"Sir Reginald of England!" continued Lucrezia, turning away with flashing eyes, but with a beseeching gesture to Alfonso, who had put his hand on his sword. "Listen!—the discourse is now of you! All of us are agreed that, inasmuch as you entered Capua in fair war, sword in hand, the first, nay, the only one—the prize should be yours. But, knight, there is a foul stain on your shield, which first must be effaced. You have rendered yourself unworthy of all chivalric recompense by basely traducing the fair fame of a noble lady!—ay, Tarquin-like, by accusing her of a crime to which you disloyally and vainly endeavoured to seduce her!"

"This is gospel-truth in all but the failure!" exclaimed the Orsino, laughing loudly. "Speak, friend of an unmatched dye! tell us all where thou didst spend the night of the quest, and how!—at least so much as thou canst without bringing blushes to this chaster Lucrezia's cheek!"

"Answer him, knight! not only before all this presence but before that above!" returned Lucrezia,

passionately. "Answer him, I command you, for I —even I am she who accuse you of a most false and perjurous calumny!"

"And remember that it was to me the boast was made, that this lady had granted you on that night a secret interview in the Vatican," said Alfonso.

"Courage, youth! 'tis but to avow thy boyish vaunting," said Cæsar, suddenly interposing.

It needed but this climax to make the passions raging in Sir Reginald's breast burst all restraints.

"No, Duke of Romagna! no, false knight, and faithless prince!" he exclaimed. "Rather I confess before all this presence what thou didst avouch to me yesterday, with purpose to awe me into betraying the secrets of the Orsini, that thyself suborned the false hag who lured me whither I went with a hope which I dared not whisper to myself—a hope which was madness and treachery and all disloyalty!—whose penalty I partly paid in the bitter mockery of that night's fruitless expectation, or will now abide, even to the worst your hatred, lady, can ordain!"

"Tush!—is it all of the silly jest I played to rebuke your sillier presumption, boy?" said Cæsar, laughing as if with mingled surprise and gaiety—but the laugh was solitary.

"Thou, thou, Cæsar! hast dared to play this jest, as thou callest it, with me, with thy sister's name!" shouted Alexander, with a fury which

seemed likely to boil over every restraint, when, luckily for Cæsar, it was diverted into another channel.

"Though it be even so, yet thou! thou, Hospitaller!" exclaimed Paolo, staring like one possessed of fiends. "Hast thou nought to declare wherefore even the despised Orsino is now content to withdraw all aspiration to this illustrious lady's hand?"

"Certes, since I kneel here in the name of Alfonso of Ferrara, humbly to offer to her acceptance a suitor with whom no Orsino may dare to contend," returned the knight, kneeling with profound homage at Lucrezia's feet.

"Now all the saints, let us hold our breath, and wake from this strange dream!" exclaimed Cæsar, in a wonder-struck tone. "Messer Bembo, speak! are we not fooled with these fine words? What power hath this man from the princes of Ferrara?"

"Even all he claims, my lord!" was the decisive reply of the amazed platonist.

"But thou, Lucrezia!—what answerest thou?" said the duke with inexpressible alarm and surprise.

"Speak, freely, Lucrezia! marches not thy consent abreast with ours, which most gladly confirms thee to Ferrara?" said Alexander, with a glare at the Orsino like that of a lion about to spring.

"As truly as I now accept this ring, which I would it were of adamant, never to be broken but by death!" said Lucrezia. "As truly as that I—and all this fair quest—find that the true praise of chivalry is due only to this noble and unstained

knight, and to him adjudge the crown of the tournament of the Colosseum."

And pronouncing the words, she accepted from the kneeling Hospitaller a costly ring of diamonds, while a herald placed the long disputed wreath of victory on his brow. The pontiff immediately arose, and with a triumph and exultation which he took no pains to conceal, pronounced his benediction on the betrothal.

"It is excellently well, but not yet is the fiat gone forth irrevocably," said Paolo, with a delirious laugh. "Faithful ambassador! I shall care that the praises of your management precede you to Ferrara!—Meanwhile, if your grace of Romagna cares to know wherefore we do not envy the duke his prize, we will tell you a sphinx's riddle, of how sharing guilt proves innocence."

"We will have you, then, and the barons of your alliance, share your guilt and prove your innocence by forming immediately the siege of Bologna," said the pontiff, in his most tempestuous tones. "Wherein you will be aided, at any need, by the arms of our potent and obedient son, the Duke of Ferrara; upon which we command you immediately, under the banner of the Gonfalonier, to march with all your forces from Rome, and commission the Duke of Romagna to execute our order within two sunsets. And for thee, audacious English boy!—if at this sunset which approaches, thou, or any of thy followers, are found in Rome, we will keep ye there as long as the walls of Santangelo are strong enough for the purpose."

And without any other formality of dismissal, and without taking any other notice of Cæsar, Alexander arose, and leaning on the Hospitaller's shoulder with one hand, while he led his daughter with the other, retired—leaving the whole assembly staring in dumb amazement at one another.

"Nay, shrink not from mine eye!" said Paolo at last, as the shame-struck Knight of England turned slowly away. "I desire no other vengeance on thee, than to hear what I can reveal. Gonfalonier, we may at least discuss with you what force we are expected to furnish to your siege of Bologna. Lend me your arms, ye faithful friends and allies!"

And with a strangely vehement action he thrust his arms into those of Cæsar and Le Beaufort, and hurried them almost involuntarily to the extremity of the hall. Overwhelming as were the news revealed, to Le Beaufort, it was remarkable that he made no comment, but with a sigh as it seemed of utter despair withdrew ere Cæsar gave vent to the prodigious emotion which convulsed his whole frame, and which far surpassed even the feelings of a brother, on a revelation which the Orsino's gloss confirmed into one of irremediable dishonour.

Unconscious or indifferent to any consequences which could now ensue from the conjunction of his enemies, the Prince of Ferrara accompanied the pontiff to his apartment, and received, with what delight may be imagined, a command to pass the remainder of the day with himself and the newly betrothed.

This first happy day of Alfonso's love, and the

happiest of his life, passed away with marvellous rapidity. Alexander approved of the envoy's project of returning on the following day with the report of his success to Ferrara; and he took so much pleasure in discussing the minutest preliminaries to be adjusted, that although the Datary arrived about nightfall, and sued for an audience on the most important business, it was long ere Alexander retired to grant it. He left the envoy with Lucrezia and her ladies, and seldom was there a company more delighting or delighted, abandoned to its own resources. In her anxiety to leave her memory brightly impressed on her lover's heart, Lucrezia displayed all her infinite charms of beauty and genius so profusely, that the intoxication of his pleasure became at length a species of pain in the unsatisfied aching of the senses which it kindled. There was something even of relief mingled with his regret, when a messenger entered to summon Lucrezia to the pontiff's presence, alone; and yet their leave-taking occupied so long a minute, that another and more impatient command followed ere she obeyed. And very shortly after, word was brought to the ladies to attend their mistress, and an intimation to the envoy that she would not be visible again that night.

To indulge in the delight of musing over the new treasure of hopes and lover-fancies he had collected in this long interview, Alfonso strolled into the gardens of the palace; and turning into one of the more secluded walks, he suddenly heard a hobbling step after him, looked round, and beheld an aged and withered crone, in a Jewish garb, who overtook and imme-

diately prostrated herself at his feet. It was Morta; but at first his preoccupied memory scarcely recognised her, until the tones of the raven-like voice fell upon his ear.

"Hist, son!—I bear a secret matter," said the hag, rising. "But first, that you may believe in me, know you this Nazarene amulet, which I bring as a token from one who learned to trust in you at Capua?"

"I have seen it ere now," said Alfonso, suspiciously, but recognising the plain silver cross of a nun, which Fiamma Colonna wore with superstitious care round her neck, among all her richer ornaments —sole relic of the past.

"The lady of your people, to whom this cross belongs, who, albeit of the skilled, hath oft sought the aidance of our powers, and who has now taken refuge on our hearth in the Ghetto, confiding in the faith and gratitude which we owe to her, from divers her enemies, more fearful than hissing snakes!—sends you this token, and by it adjures you to see her in all haste and secrecy, to devise some means by which she may fly beyond their coil and darting fangs," said Morta. "Or if it be not among things permitted or possible, that she should escape from the destroyer's power, at least she would confide to you a matter which concerns even the life of the high priest's daughter, whom ye call Lucrezia Borgia."

Alfonso had no reason to place any trust in his Jewish suppliant; but this message was so probable, and supported by circumstances which she could not

have known apparently but from Fiamma's information, that he could scarcely doubt it. Accordingly, the final statement, coupled with his knowledge of Cæsar's desperation and remorseless character, excited his apprehensions to the highest degree. At the same time his gratitude and compassion were powerfully excited by learning Fiamma's peril, which she had incurred for his advantage, augmented by the reasonable doubts to be entertained of the fidelity of those whom she had been compelled to trust. He rapidly considered the possibility of withdrawing her from Rome, under protection of his own escort, on the following day; and after many inquiries, which satisfied him of the reality of the old woman's statement, who also seemed to be in panic terror lest their conference should be overheard, he resolved on accompanying her to Fiamma's refuge. His usually darkly-garbed person, he thought, would run little risk of being recognised in the courtly array in which he was now bedizened, with the addition of the general nocturnal vizard and cloak worn by the gallants at a period when innumerable feuds rendered almost every third man an enemy. He took care, moreover, not to lose sight of the Jewess, gave no intimation of his purpose of sallying forth to the attendants in the palace, who might have betrayed it, and proceeded with Morta to a private exit of the Vatican on the Tiber, and called a boat. Somewhat ominously the boatman proved to be Giorgio Schiavone. The old man seemed older now than ever, or more taciturn; he took scarcely any notice of his fare, and probably did not recognise him.

Landing at the Ghetto, Morta hobbled up to the knight, and not altogether counterfeiting the anxiety she displayed, she implored him not to reveal it if she guided him into the Ghetto by a much nearer way than skirting the walls to the gate—with a chance of being refused admittance, as it was past the legal hour. With a vague misgiving, whose warnings he despised to his cost, Alfonso heard her propose the watercourse which he had formerly discovered, and which she declared was now so low as scarcely to wet over the sole of a foot. Yet he consented, and they entered the narrow gangway with great facility, the Jewess leading the way; and they proceeded by the dim light which fell from between the walls, until he imagined they were near the dwelling of the sorceresses, when he heard a loud crash behind. He had scarcely time to turn in alarm to ascertain what had happened ere streams of light blazed down upon him from various unsuspected holes in the lofty walls of the enclosure, and innumerable Hebrew physiognomies, all instinct with malice and rage, appeared at them. A storm of hootings and revilings and cries for vengeance assailed his ears like the shrieks of discordant birds in an Indian forest. Arquebuses and cross-bows were levelled at him from many points, and he perceived that the waters were rising rapidly, and that an iron grill had descended between him and the exit. At this formidable minute the door of the Jewesses' house flew open, and Miriam appeared shrieking "Francesco!" with delirious and despairing iteration. Morta called to the knight to

take refuge, and ran up the stairs, seizing Miriam in her arms and forcing her violently away. Alfonso made but one spring into the vault after her, which was in total darkness, and suddenly he felt himself seized on all sides. He attempted to draw his sword, but it was snatched from the sheath behind, and at the instant when he gave himself up to destruction, light flashed in, and he found himself completely hemmed in by a throng of Hebrews, the majority armed, and all raging with imprecations and fury.

Treachery and Cæsar were ideas which rushed simultaneously upon Alfonso's mind, and he expected nothing but immediate destruction; but, to his surprise, the infuriate throngs became suddenly still, and an ancient Jew tottered from the ranks, quivering and coughing with age and fury. "Yield thee, accursed Nazarene! betrayer of the daughters of the people!—yield thee, that would bring on us the vengeance of the greedy Ammonite! Bind him and lead him before the Senator, as the Threatener commanded, without delay—even by the gate which opens on the Orsini square, where wait his officers and the accursed Inquisitor," he yelled.

Somewhat relieved by finding that there was no immediate purpose of assassination, but not in the least relishing the ulterior prospect, Alfonso vehemently protested his innocence, and appealed to Morta, whose sister had dragged Miriam out.

"Man of Gath! dog of mine enemy! shall I witness for thee that hast betrayed our father's blood to shame, and the judgment that is upon it!" shrieked

Morta. "Accursed be thou and all thy tribe; and blessed be they who in any manner contribute to thy and their destruction!"

"Away with him; he is the goat of atonement to the Nazarene!" continued the old Jew, vehemently. "He hath no part in Israel. Let them judge the Christian by the Christian law."

"Ay, let them impale him living as they did my son—my Reuben!" yelled another elder. "Let him linger as he did until sunset—until the vultures were so hungry they would no longer delay; and the Nazarene suffered me neither to drive them away, nor wet his blackening lips with water!"

This dreadful reminiscence, and the agony of the old man's grief, rekindled the capturers to so furious a wrath, that it was only by urging upon them the positive commands they had received, that the elder hindered them from proceeding to instant vengeance. Alfonso himself felt that his only hope of redemption was in present submission; but while he was expostulating with his capturers a guard of halberdiers belonging to the Senator of Rome made their entry. He took some hope from the sight, especially as young Fabio Orsino was among them, instantly declared that he was the envoy of Ferrara, and demanded protection in the pontiff's name. But the youth's only answer was a wild laugh of derision and hatred, and an order to the Jews to come immediately with their complaint and prisoner before the tribunal of his brother, an order which was instantly obeyed.

Meanwhile, no good or evil angel whispered any

tidings of these events in the Vatican. Fraught with the nectar of the delicious passion which now pervaded her whole voluptuous nature, Lucrezia had obeyed the pontiff's summons, not without some surprise, which was deepened when on entering his presence she observed the agitation of his countenance and manner. Fixing his eyes upon her with a sternness which she had never yet found in them, Alexander somewhat accounted for his wrath by declaring that a report had been brought to him of a calumny invented by the Orsini, which rendered it advisable that she should not see the envoy of Ferrara again. Observing her vivid blush, and the warmth with which she protested against so strange a submission, Alexander's suspicions were probably strengthened. Moreover, Lucrezia dared not question what had been reported, lest it should entail some dangerous explanations; and her silence and confusion told but little in her favour. The second message was immediately despatched by the pontiff's command; but not satisfied with this precaution, and contrary to his custom, he detained Lucrezia until a late hour, affecting to be absorbed in a game of chess with her, which his Spanish skill enabled him to protract almost at pleasure.

Tidings of a tumult in the Ghetto, and of the seizure of a Christian visiting some Jewish paramour in it, arrived; but little notice was taken of it, the Senator himself having quieted the disturbance, and taken cognizance of the offence. But even when at length Lucrezia was permitted to retire, Alexander gave orders in her presence that the envoy of Ferrara

should expect a visit from him very early, that he might bestow some last instructions. Stung at heart with the suspicion which she vaguely discerned in all these movements, Lucrezia paused as she reached the threshold of the chamber in hesitation, whether to return and confide all or not—when the expression of the Datary's eyes, whose doubtful faith she knew, restrained her.

Lucrezia's misgivings were much increased when, on retiring to her apartments, she found that her nurse was not in attendance, and that the most vigilant inquiry could not ascertain what had become of her. Her agitation made even the thought of rest unpleasing to her, and she dismissed her attendants without suffering them to fulfil their usual offices; and daybreak found her still engaged in a reverie which, however sweet, brought frequent tears to her eyes. The tranquillity of the dawn diffused itself over her exhausted spirits, and she resigned herself to the slumber which now visited her even as she sat, until she was startled by a summons to attend the pontiff immediately, who desired to see her at the same time with the envoy of Ferrara.

Lucrezia was somewhat surprised, but unwilling to appear before her lover so pale and exhausted as she now imagined she looked, she sent an excuse—to which a positive and imperative command was returned. The tremulous manner of the page who brought the message, and her own apprehensions, banished every other consideration from Lucrezia's mind, and she hurried in her unchanged attire to

Alexander's presence; and on entering she was amazed and alarmed in the highest degree by his first words, demanding of her what had become of the Knight of St. John! He had disappeared from his apartment ever since sunset, and Messer Bembo, pale and trembling as a blanched winter leaf, was there to affirm the certainty of the intelligence.

The fear and utter consternation of Lucrezia apparently increased the anger of the pontiff to an uncontrollable degree. He declared his intention of seeking for him himself, and ascertaining for what reason it pleased him to conceal himself in the palace, and then without any apparent connexion he commanded Mona Faustina to be sent for. Lucrezia somewhat falteringly announced her disappearance, and Alexander's agitation visibly increased.

"Why then—where is he?" he exclaimed, in a tone of his terrible voice which made even Lucrezia tremble. "It cannot be, though we have of late heard strange stories of his licentious hypocrisy—Fiamma, the young Jewess!—dost thou hear, Lucrezia?"

"My señor, I dare aver, upon my life and honour, these are foul calumnies invented by his enemies to poison your ear against him!" said Lucrezia, with great warmth.

"Good troth, they tell us that even last night—hearken, Lucrezia!" said Alexander, waving to Bembo to retire, who affrightedly obeyed. "Hearken!" he continued, trembling with passion. "Thy Faustina!—a tale was told me—and she has fled to the

Orsini for refuge. Bears she aught on her lips which enemies would joy to hear? Wretch! where is the Knight of St. John?"

"Would to all blessed saints, my lord, I knew, that I might feel the assurance of his safety," replied Lucrezia, with a vehemence which staggered the suspicions of her wrathful sire.

"And yet," he said, after a pause, "and yet what means that deepening and ever-deepening blush? Lucrezia! listen—for I will know the worst!—and must, perchance, to save our name from a matchless ignominy! They tell me now—nay, they have proved it by some evidence—that the Hospitaller's errand here was to discover matter to prevent rather than conclude this alliance with his masters. The English knight, it seems, did formerly avouch it. And they tell me—they tell me—Lucrezia! Lucrezia! if thou art indeed the wretch I will not call thee, at least tell me in time to prevent the traitor's return with his boast to Ferrara, to overwhelm us all with everlasting shame and laughter."

"My father! what would this say?" returned Lucrezia, completely aghast.

"Girl! thou canst save his life but by one means—by yielding him to my mercy! Or wilt thou force me to proclaim all, and break into thy chambers with my Swiss?" shouted Alexander.

Lucrezia's silence of indignation, shame, and grief seemed to confirm her sire's suspicions, and completely vanquish him. He seated himself as if too dizzy to stand, and covered his face with his hands, exclaiming, "This is indeed punishment!"

"Kill me, but do not doubt me thus, señor!" said Lucrezia at last, in a dreamy tone, as if scarce believing in what she heard, and overwhelmed with apprehensions of some indistinct but mighty mischief. And it was at this instant that Burciardo entered, who quiveringly announced that two wretched old women from the Ghetto had arrived at the palace, and demanded with such strange words to be admitted to the presence of the magnificent Domina that he had come to learn her pleasure in the matter.

Alexander gave his daughter no time to refuse, by ordering the Jewesses to be admitted instantly; and all further discussion was cut short by the return of Burciardo with Notte and Morta, who either observed not, or took no heed of the presence of the pontiff in their precipitation, but rushed to Lucrezia, seized hold of her robes, and beating their breasts shrieked to her for aid in a wild sea-fowl chorus.

"We gave thee the precious potion which won thy lover's love!" yelled Morta. "Be merciful in turn. It is in our house the Nazarene is seized! But, lady, you pitied our child, and said it was a holy deed to bring back to comfort her despair the seducer of her youth whom her madness mourned as dead—slain—murdered! We have done no more!"

"True, he is rich, and lavish of his wealth, as a soldier should be," said Notte, with a terrible grin. "But, most beauteous lady! if thou wilt favour him and us, here is the noblest of his gifts—these price-

less gems which he shared in the plunder of Capua —they are thine!"

"The wreath of the tournament!" exclaimed Lucrezia, bewildered with terror and astonishment, as, weeping and wailing, the hag laid at her feet a crown of superb diamonds. "Why, what is this—the Christian!—who hath stolen these precious gems to give them to his paramour?"

"None, none—but be secret, lady!" returned Notte, and the rest was uttered simultaneously, as if the hags grudged each other so sweet a morsel of revenge. "Be secret!—for he is a monkish knight —a Knight of the White Cross of that John whom the Nazarenes call Saint!"

Lucrezia uttered a half-stifled shriek, and glancing frantically at Alexander, she exclaimed, "He is *not* in your palace, then.—But where is he?—devilish women!"

"He is conveyed—a prisoner—out of Rome; the Senator himself sat on him in judgment:—nor can we learn what hath become of him, nor of our child, our Miriam," said Morta.

"The Senator! the Orsino! a prisoner!" gasped Lucrezia, staggering and falling at her sire's feet as senseless as if dead.

When she recovered perception, almost the first object her gaze encountered was Cæsar, assiduously engaged in administering restoratives.

"Is he slain? have you murdered him, butcher?" she shrieked. "Speak! and let my heart burst!—Is he dead?"

"This frenzy indeed confirms the Orsino's be-

wildering tale!" said Cæsar, quailing beneath the fierceness of her eyes, which flashed like mad diamonds.

"Murderer! take off thy bloody hands, and tell me if he lives; if not, I speak, and reveal thee to heaven and earth the monster that thou art!" she cried with unimaginable fury.

"He is *not* dead!—no harm has befallen him!—she raves!" said Cæsar, hurriedly. "Alas! and the warning came too late! His unhallowed lusts have placed him in the Orsino's power, and he has used it to our dishonour, and sent the envoy a prisoner to Ferrara to his abused sovereigns, with full proof of his treason—unless the jest was of their invention.—And woe the day—of our shame and thine!"

So utter was the astonishment into which this amazing combination of events, so counteractive to all the purposes of the planners, plunged Lucrezia, that she stared for several moments in silence. Mistaking the nature of the thoughts which apparently overwhelmed her, Cæsar could not forbear a bitter laugh; but to his surprise in turn it was echoed by Lucrezia.

"And the detected seducer of the Hebrew's daughter, that was said to be murdered by a felon whose like hath not been on earth since Cain!" she said, dissembling her real agony as much as possible under the appearance of another. "Señor! I beseech you, if ever you loved my mother's daughter, let the villain be brought back, and suffer the full penalties of his enormous crime—for what vengeance hath he to fear from the Dukes of Fer-

rara for a guilt which they have contrived—or Cæsar lies!"

"Dios, Dios! justly hast thou punished the vile father by giving him viler children!" exclaimed Alexander, in despairing accents, for his emotion had passed all violence. "And righteously is my crime my punishment!"

"The Hospitaller's chastisement may be safely left to his lords, since even it suffices the Orsino's vengeance," replied Cæsar. "But to bring him back were impossible, unless the messenger rode the wind. It is dawn, and he was borne from Rome with the swiftest horse that hate could harness but an hour after sunset and his detection."

"Is it impossible, utterly impossible to overtake them?" said Lucrezia, with a wondrous light breaking on her fair visage. "Let him to his punishment, then, in Ferrara.—And I remain to mine in Rome; but, señor, and my father, do not condemn me unheard. Let the Senator be sent for, and utter mine accusation, and if I answer it not to convince all, let me perish without a tear even from my father!"

"The Senator is no further remote than Santangelo, whither he came at my entreaty, on receiving hostages of our blood," said Cæsar. "But what avails to feed his revenge and exultation in our visible despair?"

"Let him come, natheless," replied Lucrezia, and Cæsar looked at her as if he doubted she was delirious. But no objection was made—Alexander raising his face from his robe, in which he had

concealed his agony of grief, with a somewhat revived expression. A messenger was sent for the Orsino.

"Nay, let none stir," said Lucrezia, observing that the Jewesses were crawling out on their knees. "Ye shall not to your Ghetto with half tales of me —whereof too many are abroad; and ye shall think more fairly of your grandchild ere ye return to your poisons. Be not amazed, Cæsar! Let me but know the certainty of these ancient women's legend, and then am I content to share whatever fate befals the Lombard envoy. Messer Bembo was his colleague, and should be witness of his detection; let him too come hither."

Alexander himself began to fear that his daughter was maddened with her fears; but her firm and tranquil tone was at variance with the supposition. No long delay took place in the Orsino's arrival, who entered accompanied by the three magistrates who composed his tribunal, two inquisitors, and a notary. The joy of his vengeance was calm with its very excess; and he entered with all the ceremonious humility usual in an audience with the sovereign pontiff.

"Lord senator," said Lucrezia, after an instant's struggle of warring feeling, "how is it that you have dared to set aside the laws of Rome, that should the most have enforced them, and removed from the dread vengeance which they denounce on the crime of which he stood convict before you, the Knight of St. John?"

"Ha, lady! doth it stir your wrath so bitterly to

find the trade of our orthodox and warm-blooded Roman women thus heathenly meddled in?" said the Orsino, with a fearful smile. "But the Senator of Rome has a higher office than merely to administer her laws, if the public safety be the highest. And assuredly the alliance with Ferrara is of so much consequence to it, as to justify my removal of a rogue who was likely to ruin all, where he may abide the penalty of his machinations."

"'Tis a fair mock, but let it be a plain one," returned Lucrezia.

"What! and hast thou not even the harlot's grace to clamour when they call her by her name!" thundered Alexander.

"Even as you will, illustrious lady. Master notary, read Mona Faustina's confession in our presence ere she departed to witness it in Ferrara," replied the Orsino, quivering with impatience and triumph. The notary trembled and looked affrightedly at Alexander, but Lucrezia gave a gesture commanding him to read the paper; and dropping on both knees, he obeyed.

Mona Faustina, having doubtless fled at Cæsar's threats or instruction, had confessed all that she knew, witnessed, or suspected of the interview on the previous night; which, although it alleged no positive guilt, gave ample room for inference of future danger; for the declarant stated that until of late she had always understood, and indeed known by many circumstances, and the complaints of her lady, that the envoy had used his commission continually against Lucrezia until this interview, in

which some compact seemed made between them which produced the proposal on the following day. Faustina related her interruption, and in fact all the particulars of the scene except the words, which she could not overhear, so minutely that Lucrezia's very eyes were coloured with her blush, and the pontiff groaned aloud.

"And therefore I deemed that the alliance might be balked but for a timely removal; and if I tracked him to his haunts I did but a duty which had else been impossible, signor," said the Orsino.

"Villain! prodigious traitor!" exclaimed Cæsar, no longer able to disguise his triumph. "And among all his crimes I deem it basest—the use which he made of his Jewish paramour to spread black suspicions against myself—for my heart swells even to bursting to declare, that ever I perceived how all his shafts in the dark were aimed at me."

"Your holiness may now discern that, without meaning any treason, I may once and for ever cease in my despised suit," said the Orsino, with a calm smile of concentrated vengeance.

"Yea; I recognise the hand in it. Francesco—murdered!—Cæsar, a plotting rebel!—and Lucrezia! —Oh, thou worst of all thy wicked sex! what art thou?" groaned the overwhelmed sire.

"Señor, your daughter, and the betrothed of Alfonso of Ferrara," replied Lucrezia, calmly. "All this tale, albeit told babblingly as aged women are wont, is true!—true, that until last night and this long interview had passed between us, the faithful envoy

was resolved against the alliance which next day he perfected. For until then I knew not, and had not falsified all my brother's calumnies against me, and the dishonour his jest with the Knight of England cast on my name."

"We have yet to learn if Alfonso of Ferrara approves of the means taken to prove your innocence, lady," said Paolo.

"Wretch! dost thou even and publicly admit thy guilt?" exclaimed Alexander, despairingly.

"If it be guilt to love, most guilty I am, señor," continued Lucrezia, with sparkling enthusiasm. "But have I not oft heard you give the praise among all the princes of Italy to Alfonso of Ferrara, for all heroic, sovereign, and princely virtues? Would *he* wed pollution?—would he give his children a mother whose name should rightfully bring the colour to their brows? To prove, my father, mine innocence of this guilt imputed either in deed or intent!—Orsino, that the envoy whom you sent to Ferrara is no traitor!—Cæsar, that these ancient women have at least done nought to disprove the charges your fancy shaped in their grandchild's ravings!—I tell you all, nay, my father, I tell but you—the Knight of St. John is Alfonso of Ferrara himself!"

A sudden flash of sunshine in darkness does not more suddenly light up all that was vague and incomprehensible around it, than this revelation poured on the paralysed auditors. A silence ensued like that after a burst of thunder. Cæsar was the first that recovered his senses, and he spoke staggeringly.

"If this be so—after last night's adventure we shall not soon hear from Ferrara," he gasped.

"We will dispatch immediate pursuit to bring him back, to compel the performance," said Alexander, gazing with a troubled eye at his daughter's supreme loveliness.

"Our Lady be praised, he is beyond pursuit, then, by the Orsino's care, for under no semblance of force would I accept his hand," said Lucrezia, with a sigh. "Let him but arrive safely—and, Cæsar, remember the catacombs of San Sebastian, and on what peril he shall not!—and on the immediate return of his ambassadors do I gage the truth or falsehood of my words, my glory or my shame."

"How long hast thou known this, Lucrezia? when in the valley of Egeria mine own ears heard him avow to thee his errand against us?" said Cæsar, starting at these ominous words.

"Ay! then indeed am I the merest fool the Borgian craft hath yet entangled!" said the Orsino, at this unconscious revelation of Cæsar's deceptions.

"Retire—all!" said Alexander, with an infinitely troubled expression. "We must know all the truth, Lucrezia! But, Orsino, since the office we have given you causes so much care and toil to you, we revoke it henceforth to ourselves, and will name some of your enemies to so unpleasing a post."

"Gaze not so wildly, Cæsar; take these hags who have vilified my lord with you to your dungeons of Santangelo, and rest content we mean you no further harm—unless further be intended us," said

Lucrezia, with emphatic meaning; but even her towering spirit sank beneath the terrific expression of Cæsar's glance, and turning from him with a shudder of horror, she threw herself into her sire's outstretched arms.

CHAPTER XI.

"You lovers axe I now this question,
Who hath the werse, Arcite or Palamon ?
That one may se his lady day by day,
But in prison moste he dwellen alway.
The other where him lust may ride or go,
But sen his lady shall he never mo."

CHAUCER.

WITHIN the prescribed sunset Sir Reginald le Beaufort quitted Rome, to the undisguised delight of his followers, and especially of old William of Bampton. Ostensibly his journey was bound to Venice, and thither he proceeded by a somewhat unusual route through Urbino, receiving ere he left Rome, from an unknown hand, the bull which authorized his marriage with his cousin Alice.

Bampton understood in general that the way was chosen to avoid passing through Ferrara, by taking the sea at some of the ports of Umbria; and being totally unacquainted with the secrets of the confederate barons, into which, before their quarrel, the Orsino had admitted his English brother-in-arms, he could not divine for what reason his young lord halted at Urbino in the midst of a wild and disturbed country,

still in a tumultuous state after its recent treacherous conquest by Cæsar Borgia. Though exempted by virtue of his large and well-armed retinue from most of the dangers and insults which might have beset an ordinary traveller, there was little to render an abode in Urbino pleasant at such a period. But Le Beaufort had always some excuse or a sullen silence to oppose to the old squire's entreaties, until suddenly and of his own accord he determined on continuing his journey.

Approaching the confines of Urbino, the knight and his escort arrived in an elevated plain below the wild mountain pass into Romagna commanded by the fortress of San Leo, which was the chief strength of Urbino, and but for Cæsar's treachery might have long baffled his violence. The ascent of the pass, wild and tortuous as it was, scarce needed the guide whom Bampton had procured. A multitude of peasants, driving oxen, sheep, wains of corn, and forage, appeared toiling up the steeps, intermingled with groups of mountaineers who brought various products of their wilder regions, and were in general well armed with spears and cross-bows. Sir Reginald seemed to take no interest in the matter, but Bampton learned that a contribution—an event by no means of uncommon occurrence under the rapacious rule of the Borgian mercenaries—had been levied on the whole of the surrounding country to supply the wants of the garrison of San Leo.

It was only when they reached a tumbril loaded with massive timbers, which a long string of buffaloes could scarcely drag up the precipitous road, that Le

Beaufort made any inquiries. And then he lingered far behind his escort, and entered into a deep and long confabulation with the peasants who drove the team, the chief of whom was a powerful sunburned mountaineer whose name was Paltroni.

A tempest darkened as the English archers approached the summit of the mountain of San Leo, whence a dismal prospect was visible. To the right was a deep plain, in the midst of which arose the abrupt rock of San Marino, crowned with its republican city. Behind lay the numerous hills which circle Urbino, resembling high waves of a dark and troubled sea; and the whole prospect was bounded by the wastes of the Adriatic rolling infinitely away. Over the whole expanse brooded an immense storm ready to burst with the fury remarkable in the high latitudes of Italy.

San Leo towered above among its rocks and steeps. A drawbridge which spanned a ravine before the principal gate was lowered, and the gate itself was open to admit the peasants with their various contributions. The garrison seemed in all the insolence of security; their captain, whose drunken visage and furious tones betrayed at least one quality not unusual in the soldiery of any age, was drinking on horseback with a number of his officers, examining the arrivals by a scroll which he held in his hand, and violently abusing and even striking the unhappy persons who he was pleased to consider fell short in their contributions. When this scrutiny was undergone, the contributors passed on through a tower, the portcullis of which was raised, and the walls

more strictly guarded, into the interior of the fortress, where they deposited their levies, and received some form of acquittance.

As if observing the etiquette of fortresses, Le Beaufort halted his troop on reaching the drawbridge, and blew a trumpet to summon a parley. The captain was instantly startled from his occupation of goading an ox with his spear to prove that it was not so fat as his schedule ordained such animals should be; and in his first confusion he shouted "Treason!" and ordered the bridge to be raised.

Le Beaufort was well aware that he should be denied his request, both from the brutal character of the captain, Peter of Oviedo, and from the danger of admitting an armed force, since Cæsar's garrisons in Urbino were known to be much weakened, and in parts entirely withdrawn, to serve with the contingents of the barons in the siege of Bologna. But he rode forward on the drawbridge, and very courteously entreated a night's lodging and shelter against the coming storm in San Leo. Paltroni, meanwhile, drove his timber steadily on, and passed the knight with a stupid laugh of derision, so that the buffaloes and the masses of chained timber intervened between the captain of San Leo and his visitors.

"Clear the way, rogues!" shouted Peter of Oviedo, "and we will answer this fair request with the barking dogs above, unless the gentle damoiseau suddenly delivers us of his presence. Or, stay, what manner of armed men be ye traversing the countries of my lord, the Duke of Romagna?"

"An thou wouldst learn come hither with thy

lance," retorted Sir Reginald. "But thou liest, inhospitable churl! to say that this castle belongs to the Duke of Romagna, who hath but stolen it, like the false and disloyal plunderer that is fit to be thy master!"

This retort was received with so loud a shout by the mountaineers and peasants, whom the delay had collected in masses behind Le Beaufort, and was so vehemently echoed from within, that the captain grew much alarmed, and shouted again to close the gates. Some of the soldiers goaded the buffaloes furiously on with their spears, and by this time the masses of timber were almost immediately under the gate of the fortress; when suddenly Paltroni loosened the chains which fastened his team to their burden, snatched an axe concealed among the wood, and dashing out the brains of the nearest enemy, yelled, "God and my lord, the Duke of Urbino!" and rushed forward. The cry was instantly repeated in a thousand wild and discordant voices, both within and without the fortress; but those around Sir Reginald hesitated to cross the bridge, until setting his lance and shouting "St. George and the bonny broom!" he galloped forward, followed after an instant of astonishment by his valiant men-at-arms. The next moment Peter of Oviedo was dashed to the earth with a stroke as irresistible as a thunderbolt. Then suffering his lance to drop, useless in a close conflict, Le Beaufort drew his sword, and Saint George himself never raged more destructively among a paynim host than he among the soldiers of the Borgia.

The conflict, though fierce, was short, for the sur-

prise was complete; and this was the project which Paolo Orsino had long meditated as a means of restoring courage to the confederacy by tearing Urbino from Cæsar's grasp, which the general devotion of the people to their dispossessed duke, and the withdrawal of Cæsar's troops, rendered feasible. He had concluded that all hope from it was over, and that Sir Reginald had betrayed the plan to Cæsar; but acquainted with the intents, means, and passwords of the party, Le Beaufort gave in this achievement a noble refutation of the suspicion; for it was principally by his desperate courage and exertions, seconded by those of Paltroni, a valiant soldier secretly in the service of the banished duke, that in a short time the fortress was in the hands of the assailants. Of all the garrison only a few whom Sir Reginald saved, among whom was the captain, escaped the pitiless vengeance which their cruelty and exactions had provoked.

The difficulty was now to keep what they had gained; and Sir Reginald took charge of the fortress with his disciplined forces, while Paltroni spread the news in every direction, and roused the whole country to revolt. Sir Reginald himself was engaged in causing the timber to be removed from the drawbridge, which he no longer desired to obstruct, when he performed, for the first time, the honours of his castellainship to a singular visitant. A figure crossed the drawbridge, and fell spent at his feet like an exhausted deer—a negro, whose black skin was foamy white with froth, whose tongue hung flabbing to his chin, whose eyes were rimmed with blood, and

whose frame palpitated with fatigue. He had scarcely strength to draw a letter from his belt ere he became insensible. Bampton recognised him as the Duke of Romagna's runner, commonly styled "the Strangler;" and Le Beaufort, laughingly calling all to witness that the missive was addressed to the captain of San Leo, opened it.

Le Beaufort, however, speedily discovered that the epistle was in cypher; but his curiosity was strongly excited, and he gave orders to bring Peter of Oviedo to translate it. A lean monk, who had been that worthy's chaplain, however, declared that his principal could not read, and that he possessed the key of the cypher himself, to conduct his correspondence. To ingratiate himself with the new masters the monk worked assiduously at the task which was confided to him, and the result was certainly interesting to Sir Reginald. It contained a brief but sufficiently clear account of the Orsini seizure of the envoy of Ferrara, and the extraordinary reasons which rendered it of the highest consequence to the Borgias to prevent the execution of their plan of conveying the guilty envoy to Ferrara. The captain was therefore commanded, if, as was probable, even the unembarrassed speed of the African runner had not regained the few hours' start he had lost, and the Orsini, with their prisoner, had passed through San Leo, whatever instructions or passport they might bear to the contrary, the castellain was to pursue at all possible speed, and rather to destroy the whole party than suffer it to proceed. But if possible the prisoner himself was to be brought back to San Leo,

and guarded with a vigilance the importance of which the great reward offered by Cæsar attested, until farther instructions arrived.

This document was several times read to Sir Reginald ere he could bring himself to credit the facts it revealed. And then having satisfied himself by inquiries that the African runner had indeed regained the start by his wonderful speed, and headed the destined prey, but certainly only by a short distance —without hinting at his knowledge of the prisoner's real rank, and in a tumult of soul which scarcely left him power to shape any definite resolution, he sent forth scouts in every direction, with orders to bring the Orsini and their prisoner to San Leo.

Towards evening the whole party indeed rode into the fortress; for though the Orsini had heard of the revolt and seizure of San Leo, they calculated equally on the friendship of the Urbinists and their hatred of the Borgias to permit their free passage on an errand so distasteful to the latter. Young Fabio Orsino commanded the party, selected, it is probable, rather to give weight by his rank and alliance to the accusation against the envoy than as a fit leader for so delicate and perilous an enterprise. But he was accompanied by dependents on his house of ripe years and experience, and a retinue of veteran men-at-arms.

Le Beaufort purposely kept himself out of sight until the escort had dismounted, and the prisoner was conveyed to an apartment which he had ordered to be made ready for him. From a loophole in one of the towers, however, he witnessed the arrival; and

his heart swelled full of mingled passions when he saw the Knight of St. John, enveloped in a coarse mantle and hood, his arms secured by an iron hoop to his waist, and locked in his saddle with chains and a padlock, but still preserving his princely stateliness and calm. A woman came also in the cavalcade, in whose woful countenance Le Beaufort recognised Mona Faustina.

Fabio Orsino was, however, somewhat surprised when he recognised in the conqueror of San Leo the Knight of the Sun, marvellously changed in the brief period which had elapsed. But believing him to be animated by the bitter hostility which Cæsar's conduct towards him had justly provoked, and his own had demonstrated, he was in nowise alarmed. On his part Le Beaufort was amazed at the change which had come over the spirit of the young Orsino; the silent and studious boy, whose gentleness and reserve were the only qualities for which he had ever noticed him, was become a demoniac of revenge and hatred against the false envoy of Ferrara. Le Beaufort felt assured, but that Fabio anticipated a dreadful doom to his prisoner from his incensed masters, that he would himself have put him to death; and this idea was too amply confirmed when, working himself into frenzy with the tale which he told of the envoy's success with Lucrezia, and the ruin of his brother's hopes, and knowing that Sir Reginald was a companion in affliction, Fabio threw himself into his arms, and in agony of grief confessed that he himself—the pale and neglected schoolboy, whose existence she had perhaps scarcely

noticed—had long been devoured with a secret passion for Lucrezia!

Le Beaufort had at first intended to warn Fabio of the danger of his mission, and procure the release of the prince; but this revelation, and the certainty that the Orsini escort more than equalled his own force in number, and that the Urbinists would desire to keep so important a hostage in their hands, if discovered, deterred him. He rapidly formed a plan, which he communicated only to the one or two of his own men who were necessary to aid him in it.

Towards midnight the prisoner was awakened from the broken slumbers in which his doubtful situation permitted him to indulge, by the gleam of a torch; and starting from his couch, he beheld what he at first thought was an apparition—a knight in complete armour, whose face was deadly pale, and which was that of Sir Reginald le Beaufort.

"Be not amazed, Don Alfonso!" said the knight, in a human though quivering voice. "I know not whether your capturers have informed you of what hath fortuned in these parts; but I am Reginald le Beaufort, and now hold this castle for the Duke of Urbino."

"And come you then to play the assassin's part? But your nature is indeed all changed!" said Alfonso, raising himself with a despairing glance at his pinioned arms, from which the relentless Fabio never suffered the iron hoop to be removed.

"It is a bitter word, not all unmerited, and I will bear it—yet our Lady knows, had one slain me when I accepted that false hope of paradise, the anguish of

my remorse would have pardoned him!" returned Le Beaufort. "But fear not, my once brother-in-arms! I come to set you free, to redeem you from the hands of the Orsini, for assuredly some will recognise you in Ferrara, and it may be ere thou hast assistance to escape their vengeance.—Free, but on one condition, which thou must swear to fulfil as thou art a knight and a prince, or failing in which that thou wilt lay aside the superiority of rank, and do me right in single battle on it."

"Name your condition, and I will answer—but even in this extremity, as I am both, I will not be compelled to aught against mine honour!" replied Alfonso.

"Nay, but most with it," returned Sir Reginald; and continuing with an effort which scarcely controlled his agitation. "Your strange 'haviour in Rome, your seizure in the Ghetto, argue that Lucrezia—is already grown indifferent to you.—And if —it is enough!—but swear to me not to repay her too lavish love with ingratitude and desertion—fulfilling the black hope of Cæsar and the Orsini in her dishonour and universal ignominy—but to become as you have pledged yourself, her husband and lord."

Alfonso looked at the knight for some moments in silence, almost envying the chivalrous devotion and generosity of his love; but he replied with vehemence, "Abandon me then to mine enemies, sithence you dishonour both Lucrezia and me by this compulsion! This only I reply. By all the unstained glories of my race, if Lucrezia had yielded to

the madness of the passion which I avow exhausted my soul in entreaties—though seconded by all the burning eloquence of the love which I know she bears for me—never should my mistress have become my wife! Therefore, if you set me free, and I demand not her hand from Ferrara—you shall know that I am the nice-souled traitor of her too lavish love, and I will meet thee in a desert with only our swords for umpires to adjudge the wrong or the right of my resolve!"

"I am content and will believe you, for ever I have found you princely and noble," replied Le Beaufort; and with some wrenching irons which he had brought with him he forced the iron hoop from his rival's waist and arms.

Alfonso, meanwhile, completely vanquished by the generosity of the English knight, and anxious to clear both himself and Lucrezia in his opinion, related what had truly led him into the Ghetto. This narrative entailed many other particulars, and seduced by the mutual intensity of the interest both took in the subject, he revealed most of the extraordinary circumstances by which he had satisfied himself of Lucrezia's innocence and of Cæsar's prodigious guilt. The revelation perhaps did Le Beaufort some service, since it convinced him of the utter hopelessness of his passion, in the warmth of that which he found Lucrezia entertained for her plighted husband. But their communications were necessarily brief and imperfect; and it was not until he reached Ferrara that Alfonso comprehended the full danger he had escaped by Le Beaufort's interposition.

Loosened from his shackles, Sir Reginald disguised his rival by lending him the armour and mantle of one of his archers; and easily led him out of the fortress, in which the exhausted capturers and the Orsini were either engaged in wassail or asleep. One of his own best steeds was in readiness beyond the walls; and there they parted, Sir Reginald delivering the prince a passport which he had compelled Peter of Oviedo to sign with his peculiar mark for the Borgias, and one of Paltroni's for the Urbinists, in case he met with any parties of either. Only a few hours' journey intervened to Ferrara, and as the road was well known to Alfonso, with these safe conducts he ran little danger if once beyond the pursuit of the Orsini. They parted—but despite the great service he had just rendered—Sir Reginald could not bring himself to return the embrace of his former friend, whose proud soul was wounded by the reserve which met his gratitude—and they parted finally in utter silence.

The escape was not known until the following morning, and all was utter amazement and suspicion until Sir Reginald publicly avowed that he had himself effected it, and declared to the astounded Orsini the peril which they had escaped in escorting such a prisoner into Ferrara, and to the Urbinists the advantage of securing the friendship, or at least preventing an open breach with so powerful a neighbour which any violence from the Orsini must have occasioned—announcing that the Knight of St. John was Alfonso of Ferrara himself! If these tidings needed any confirmation, thus certified by the

prince's ancient comrade, it was brought in the arrival of Monsignor d'Enna, a prelate known to be devoted to the service of Cæsar, who had probably instructions which he thought proper to suppress on finding how matters had gone, and that he was himself a prisoner, but who fully confirmed the tidings of what had passed in Rome by pretending orders for the release and honourable treatment of the illustrious captive. In the height of his defiance and hate Sir Reginald replied by sending Monsignor d'Enna, the African runner, and Mona Faustina to the nearest of Cæsar's fortresses in Romagna, with instructions to present themselves before their chief as soon as possible, with tidings that his commands had been anticipated. Fabio Orsino was alarmed into acquiescence by the confession he had made, and the strange conduct of his English fellow-sufferer; but all cordiality and sympathy was at an end between them.

CHAPTER XII.

"Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,
And chastise with the valour of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crowned withal."

Macbeth.

The seizure of San Leo was followed by the revolt of the whole country of Urbino; and in less time than he had lost it Guidobaldo recovered his whole duchy, with the exception of two or three fortresses, to which he laid immediate siege. The entreaties of the duke, and his own thirst for vengeance, proved too powerful for all Bampton's renewed expostulations; and Le Beaufort remained the chief support of the insurrection, which his fiery zeal and courage was rapidly changing into a revolution.

The results of the events of Urbino were still more momentous than themselves. The Roman barons recovered from the panic into which they had fallen on the desertion of France and successes of Cæsar. Instead of obeying his summons to attend him in the siege of Bologna, whither he had himself been sud-

denly commanded by the pontiff, the vicars of the church met in a solemn diet at Magione, in Perugia, and formed an open league against the Borgias, and an engagement to assist in restoring all the dispossessed barons, and especially the Duke of Urbino. In consequence of this wise and bold resolution, the Duke of Gravina, Vitellozzo, and Oliverotto da Fermo marched with all their disposable forces into Urbino, to foil the attack of a large force despatched by Cæsar, under the command of Don Migueloto, imagining that he should easily recover the province by a sudden blow, and not dreaming of the combination entered into against him.

Cæsar himself was at Imola, apparently busied in obeying the commands of the pontiff, in preparing for the siege of Bologna, when the first shock of his changing fortune fell upon him in the news of the surprise of San Leo, and the rescue of the Prince of Ferrara. The possession of Alfonso's person would have been of incalculable political advantage to him; and on that event in great measure depended the plans which his desperation had now formed, and into which, ever since his disgrace with the pontiff, he had been elaborately and most secretly endeavouring to seduce the barons of the confederacy. But suddenly the events of San Leo overthrew all his combinations, and gave the barons courage to refuse his offers, and array themselves in open resistance to the Borgian sway, while it rendered their chief adviser, Paolo, hopeless of any advantage to be derived from his aid, and bent only on vengeance.

From a situation of seeming power and triumph a few days reduced Cæsar to one of the utmost difficulty and danger. All Italy heard with amazement that he was shut up in Imola with a scanty force, within a few hours' march of the Lords of Bologna, who were preparing to attack him, while at Perugia were gathering the forces of the southern barons, under the command of the exasperated Paolo, which at once overawed Rome, and prevented all hope of retreat upon it. Umbria in commotion, Romagna doubtful, Ferrara justly irritated, little hope of help from the French at Milan, whose viceroy was a personal enemy to Cæsar, the Venetians his most bitter enemies, the Florentines wavering between two almost equal dislikes—the condition of Cæsar seemed to be almost desperate, when the battle of Cagli completed his misfortunes. In this action Migueloto was defeated by the Duke of Urbino, the Orsini, and Sir Reginald, with nearly the total destruction of his army, saving his own life with difficulty from the carnage.

The success of the confederates was now clearly discerned in the alarm which seized all who had any reason to dread it. Principal among these was the republic of Florence, which viewed in the triumph of the confederacy that of its exiled tyrants, the Medici. In their alarm at so rapid a revolution, and fearing that Cæsar, since his retreat was cut off on Rome, must surrender himself to the Orsini, the signory determined to send an ambassador to offer him shelter in their dominions. This office, believing

that the duke entertained much liking for him, was conferred on Messer Niccolò di Bernardo Machiavelli.

A strange lull had, however, come over the operations of the confederates before Messer Niccolò reached Imola, where he scarcely hoped to find that Cæsar still ventured to remain. But on arriving in sight of the city the white banner of the church still floated on the walls, from which that of the Bentivogli, on the summit of San Pietro, was dimly visible.

The secretary of the magnificent signory was received with all the honours of a friend in need; and riding gravely through the narrow and gloomy streets he entered the principal square, in which was a large building, half palace and half fortress, formerly the residence of the dispossessed Riarii. The duke was lodged in this abode, and an apartment was assigned in it by special favour to Messer Niccolò. Duly installed in his chambers, Machiavelli was busied in arranging his toilet for an audience, from a truly republican wardrobe, consisting only of one good suit to relieve that in which he travelled, when the tapestry behind a mirror, before which he was arranging his attire with a very studious and earnest look, was lifted, and the duke himself entered.

"Ha, Niccolò! and so their magnificences can only afford you one suit of Genoa black?" said Cæsar, with his wonted vivacity, and glancing at the large open chest which betrayed even as much.

"Republics, signor, do not love to waste their gold in gilding—and mine own patrimony lies chiefly in

vineyards, much ravaged of late by the Vitelli," replied the secretary, with some confusion. "But most heartily do I rejoice to find your excellence in such health and cheerfulness."

"Wherefore not, Niccolò?" replied Cæsar. "But continue thine apparelling, for in a few minutes, remember, thou art to have an audience of the Duke of Romagna—at present a gossip with thine old friend and scholar, Cæsar Borgia."

"And as either, signor, it both grieves and satisfies me to be the bearer of my lords' offer of shelter and receipt from your encompassing enemies," replied Niccolò.

"Nay, do they deem me at such a pass?" replied Cæsar, with a cloud passing over his visage. "But the deeper the darkness the brighter shall be my emergence from it.—Yet am I well content to hear thine errand, for well I know the barons have implored ye to join in the alliance against the tyrant—is it not so?"

"With infinite supplications, signor, but as long as the Orsini and Vitelli are cousins of the Medici, in vain," replied the secretary.

"But thou hast doubtless some heavy conditions to make to me for the favour and protection of thy lords?" said Cæsar, darting his keen and sarcastically smiling eye at the envoy.

"Nay, my lord, mine office and the will of their magnificences are fulfilled, if I can prevail upon you to accept their aid, and to deny submission to the power of your insolent rebels," returned Machiavelli.

"Why, truly, if we conclude a peace, I doubt not the restoration of the Medici will be among their dictations," said Cæsar, thoughtfully.

"Assuredly then your excellence can have no thought of any, since it were your final and utter ruin!" exclaimed the alarmed secretary.

"Why, doth not thine own errand tell thee I am desperate?" replied Cæsar, with a strange smile, in which lurked some occult meaning. "Let the republic be wise with the rest, and leave my broken fortunes to stagger down, even after the French fashion—for you see they send me not a spear from Milan."

"But, my lord, though our will be stronger to aid you than our power, there is your new and puissant ally of Ferrara fails you not at this deadly pinch," said the secretary.

"In truth, his ambassadors—and we hear great tidings of their magnificence—passed through the Bolognese yesterday," replied Cæsar, with a darkening brow. "But they come awooing not fighting, Niccolò; and some mischief-makers have persuaded them that as long as my garrisons exercise themselves on the frontiers of Ferrara it is as well to keep at home. True 'tis, they pretext the Venetians to his holiness—who admits the excuse. So let it be—awhile. Yet we thank them—they have done us more good than they intended. Signor Paolo hath at length deigned to hear our earnest supplications, and on my hostages reaching his camp will graciously visit Imola to command what I must do

to be received back into the favour of himself and his fellow rebels."

"Then I beseech your excellence to give me some assurance that nought shall be stipulated to the prejudice of the republic," said Machiavelli.

"I would not men should gage my fears by my promises," returned Cæsar. "When I fear less, I will promise—when I do not fear at all, I will perform. And now, Niccolò, throw off the ambassador as I have doffed the duke, and tell me truly, what deemest thou of my present state?"

"Firstly and chiefly, I do marvel to see a prince of your lordship's wisdom in it," said Machiavelli, hastily.

"Even as men marvel to see a fox in a trap," said Cæsar, smiling.

"Again, signor, remembering our frequent discourses, it mazes me that you should have made no effort to raise an army of your own, but fatally continued to trust in auxiliaries and mercenaries," said the politician, somewhat timorously.

"Niccolò, Niccolo!—but I know that I can trust thee, for thou hast no manner of interest to betray me," said Cæsar. "And, therefore, I will tell thee—that but for the madness of the English knight, which hurried on my projects to too sudden and violent a catastrophe—little hath befallen me which I had not planned and desired;—for only the terror and wrath of so mighty a combination could have driven his holiness and her lovesickness (I speak of

the old man and his daughter) to open their coffers, and suffer me to levy some such host as thou hast so oft advised, and they have ever denied. But, Niccolò, they dream not what an army I am secretly gathering in my citadels—and did never a bird in Florence whisper in thy keen ear how I have bought all King Frederic's artillery—which the boasting French thought all too dear valued but by the weight? And thus thou seest that to protract my danger is my truest policy. I need nothing but time—and that this very powerlessness for which thou blamest me has won me. And though I but tap my wedges noiselessly, they are riving the confederacy in every direction. Thou wouldst smile to know how the Bentivogli delay an assault on me here, which I could not resist, because I talk of leaving them Bologna, and accepting their gold and troops instead; how the Orsini listen to my wondrous plans on Ferrara, to commence with a forced marriage at Rome; how the Vitelli are willing I should seize Sienna; and the Petrucci that Guidobaldo need not be restored."

Machiavelli himself could only gaze in wonder at his great pupil, or rather master.

"Then still, still in my Cæsar do I behold the destined deliverer of Italy, the expeller of the barbarians from her beautiful, though ravaged breast!" he exclaimed in a kind of prophetic furor.

"Yea, I will become so glorious that my faults—if I have any—shall show to men's wondering gaze no darker than the spots in yonder sun that sets

blazing over the mountains and valleys of Italy, in which my name shall be eternal as that of the first Cæsar!" said the Borgia, kindling into a rapture of ambition not unusual with him. "But peace, peace; there is an earthquake between me and my visions, and ruins the boldest seers yet dream not! Meanwhile the Orsini have smoothened my first steps; no entreaties, even of Lucrezia, can soften the pontiff's wrath against them—for they have prated to raise an anti-pope in Italy in the person of his bitterest foe, the Cardinal ad Vincula, and Lucrezia knows how the Orsini hate her last love, the Prince of Ferrara."

"But when my lords shall hear that Paolo Orsino has been with your excellence, what can I say to comfort them?" said Machiavelli, dolefully.

"Niccolò, I know I may confide in thee as to mine own heart; but even that I would not trust if I could help it, lest some unguarded throbbing should betray me," replied Cæsar, musingly; and then rising with that smile of his, darker than any frown, he continued—"Tell your lords merely, that delay is my only hope, and that negotiations are tedious matters. And add, that I prick my ears on all sides—and *bide my time!*"

Thus ended the first conference of Messer Niccolò's remarkable embassy; and in consequence he beheld with the less alarm the arrival of the Lord Paolo on the following day. Moreover, the vigilant secretary noted a deadly paleness, and a glow in the young baron's eyes, when he left the presence of Cæsar, taking care to throw himself accidentally in

his way to observe, which was a remarkable change from his firm and haughty manner on arriving.

Had the confederacy pushed on its successes with vigour, the Borgian grandeur was now undoubtedly on the brink of an abyss into which it might easily have been hurled. But the utter submission which he feigned, and the certainty of the danger of the position to which they had reduced him, made the barons imagine that they had really achieved all, and inclined them to listen to his entreaties to dictate their own terms. Subdued by the magic which Cæsar found in the passions of men, Paolo Orsino became his most efficient instrument; and when once the tie of a common danger was slackened, the points of disunion were so numerous and so dexterously seized by Cæsar, that not only did he protract the negotiation, but gradually introduced so many distrusts and disputes among the allies, that it was against his own will and entreaties that Alexander's urgent demands procured him at length the reinforcement of a body of French troops, which, with his own levies, rendered him once more on a par with his assailants.

The consternation was again very great; but Cæsar betrayed no symptoms of departing from the terms which he had assented to in his evil plight, and even Vitellozzo began to believe in his sincerity when he renewed his proposals for a general peace. He even relinquished his design on Bologna, and consented to receive, instead of the submission of its lords, a large contingent of men and money. It is true that he would no longer listen to the stipulations

of the confederates in favour of the Duke of Urbino; but to quiet their fears, he offered to dismiss the French aid, if they would promise to assist him in the recovery of that state. Paolo urged this article with infinite zeal, alleging its advantages in placing the person of the duke in the hands of the confederacy, and limiting the sphere of his mischievous activity. Finally, he procured, or rather Cæsar himself suggested, that to obviate mistrusts only one of the chiefs should be compelled to serve him in person, who should command the whole of their forces under him.

Paolo himself declared his readiness to be the first to accept this dangerous honour; and the advance of Cæsar with his French allies, and the desertion of several powerful barons from the league, so seconded his eloquence that the fatal compact was at last concluded. The unfortunate Duke of Urbino, finding resistance hopeless, between his approaching enemies and his false allies, fled once more to Venice, destroying the majority of his fortresses ere he departed, that they might not be again used in the oppression of his faithful vassals. He released his adherents from all obligations, only entreating and obtaining from Sir Reginald le Beaufort that he would take charge of the city of Sinigaglia until his sister, its sovereign, could effect her escape.

The Florentine secretary's satisfaction in the turn of affairs was of course very great; and he incessantly urged his favourite maxims on Cæsar, especially the expediency of utterly destroying the power of the barons, now that he had the means in his

hands. Many emphatic assurances of assent did he receive; and in fact Cæsar's army, composed chiefly of the French auxiliaries, moved on as if to attack that of the barons, when suddenly, on arriving at Fano, the conclusion of a peace, and the dismissal of the French, were announced in a breath, to the astonishment of all, and of none more than of the French themselves.

Cæsar alleged the exhausted state of the country, and the impossibility of otherwise restoring the confidence of the barons; but it was reported, and was in some measure true, that the French retired in high dudgeon at the cavalier treatment they had received. On the contrary, the joy of the confederates was unbounded; and at Paolo's request, and as a mark of their confidence, they agreed to concentrate their army on Sinigaglia, and recover it for the duke, provided that he would not come among them in person. The lady of Sinigaglia had indeed effected her escape by Le Beaufort's exertions; and it was known that he retained the city only until the galleys, which Duke Guidobaldo had promised to send from Venice, could arrive to convey himself and his soldiery thither. But since the escape of the Knight of St. John from San Leo, Paolo's resentment against Le Beaufort had become a species of frenzy, so that he readily consented to gratify the revengeful feeling which apparently induced Cæsar to desire the attack.

The barons stipulated that Cæsar should remain at Fano, a town about fifteen miles from Sinigaglia, on the same line of coast. Of the great chieftains who commanded the confederate army, the three Orsini,

Vitellozzo, and Oliverotto da Fermo were the principal; and from the walls of Sinigaglia Le Beaufort beheld a numerous host, under their banners, emerge from the defiles of the mountains above it.

Le Beaufort was well aware of the inadequacy of his means of resistance, the city itself being weak, the inhabitants disaffected or panic-struck, and his soldiery scarcely sufficient to man the walls. Nevertheless he put on a good countenance, when Paolo Orsino appeared to summon the city, which he performed without the least sign of recognising his ancient friend, and with great insolence and contempt of manner. Irritated by this conduct, and well aware of the mistrusts between the barons and Cæsar, Le Beaufort replied with equal scorn, by declaring that, since he was called upon to surrender the city to the church, he would only yield its keys to her lieutenant in person, the Duke of Romagna.

"Farewell, then, governor of Sinigaglia, and when we meet again, one of us shall be on the brink of his eternal doom!" shouted Paolo; and it was a prophecy, though the prophet knew it not.

Preparations for an assault commenced, but the citizens now openly deserted the walls, and as his own force was quite inadequate to their defence, Le Beaufort resolved to retreat to the citadel, and make what terms he could. The citizens immediately negotiated with the besiegers, and towards evening their banners were seen waving on the walls, and their host swarming in the streets.

Two days of continual assaults, valiantly repulsed, taught the besiegers to respect the courage of their

enemies, but the castle into which they had retreated was now enclosed on all sides, and Cæsar had sent some ordnance to the assistance of his allies, which began to tell upon the ancient walls. Having little motive to protract his defence longer than honour required, Le Beaufort now determined to propose the surrender of the citadel, on condition that he and his troops were allowed to retire unmolestedly to Venice.

The barons were in deep consultation when this message arrived, but on another subject, with which, nevertheless, Paolo Orsino immediately connected it.

"And this, signori, is the occasion which the duke bade me take to introduce his earnest suit for the conference," he exclaimed. "Perchance he meditates some vengeance, not unjust, on this treacherous foreigner; or merely the delight to humble his pride prompts him to desire that he shall indeed be compelled to present the keys of Sinigaglia to the lieutenant of the church in person. But be that as it may, it were ungracious to refuse; and what can we fear, since he has dismissed the French, since the Florentines are full of fear and mistrust of him in our alliance, since we are to receive him in the midst of our own victorious legions?"

"Wherefore should Cæsar Borgia desire to put his person in our hands?" said Vitellozzo, suspiciously shaking his long grey beard.

"Nay, father Vitelli, let us not ask the wherefore, but seize the when," said Oliverotto da Fermo. "For my part, I say, let us get him among us, and then propose Tuscany, and if he refuses, cut his throat,

and throw him to some dog to lick clean for his shroud."

"Peace, bull-dog, thou art enough to ruin the devices of Solomon," said Vitellozzo, glaring half-pleasedly at his ferocious lieutenant, and yet rebukingly. "But, no, Paolo, no; we conditioned that only one should dance in his nets at a time, and thou hast devoted thyself to the office."

"It is true, but, Vitelli, hast thou considered the danger to leave all your soldieries uncaptained, and exposed to the influence of his silvery tongue?" replied Paolo.

"His silvery tongue will sing in vain to my rough German ritters," said Oliverotto, laughing hoarsely.

"Ay, but what say you to his gold one? And the old Catalan, though he groans to waste his daughter's dowry, flings it out with both hands in his terror," replied Paolo. "Yet Cæsar, foreseeing this objection, consents that we should quarter our Italian soldiery in the neighbouring towns and castles, and keep the camp only with our mercenaries."

"Methinks he hath not three hundred lances with him at Fano, and I keep the town with a thousand," said Oliverotto. "Surely his head is addled in some of these late thunderstorms, or by the panics we have given him."

"Christ's death! I will not enter any hole that is so smooth and open, with so relishing a smell of cheese at the bottom," said Vitellozzo, in a resolved tone. "For I misdoubt this goodly project he hath

to propose, which is to remove all reason of jealousy or quarrel from among us for ever, is neither more nor less than some such savoury bait. No, by the cross of God! I will not venture within his clutch."

"Nay, then, Paolo, let us be plain with them," said the Duke of Gravina, impetuously. "Sirs, what is more dangerous to us than this alliance of the Borgias with Ferrara? What if some good saint hath put it into Cæsar's head that it would also cause his ruin, sithence the old man's dotage would henceforth seek to make the name of his daughter's children greatest in Italy. Who knows not that Urbino and Romagna kiss with Ferrara on the mountains? And what were easier, in the lull of these gorgeous bridalties, wherewith Alexander flaunts our house, were we of a mind with Cæsar, than to set him on a throne the which to keep may furnish him with amusement for the rest of his life, sever him for ever from the favour of France, and of the pontiff, and make him dependent wholly upon us for support. I say not that this is Cæsar's project, but I say—what if it were?"

With all his desire to carry his point, Paolo felt an ominous thrill in his heart when he heard his father thus repeat the ideas which he had laboriously infused into his mind. But he hastened to break the silence which followed.

"Nay, further, we shall have a hostage of Cæsar's sincerity which none can doubt," he exclaimed. "This betrothed lady must pass through the duke's towns of Romagna on her way; and Cæsar hath sworn that until with his own hand he gives her to

me as the bride which his treacherous sire long promised her, he will not ask us to raise a lance in his name."

"Hark, how young Fabio sighs; even the children will not suck these poisoned sweetmeats," said Vitellozzo, but evidently staggered.

It was long, however, before the obstinate misgivings of the Vitelli could be vanquished; but such is the power of words sent glowing from the mints of passion, that Paolo prevailed at length upon the barons to grant Cæsar the meeting he desired. Vitellozzo consented, with as gloomy a visage as if signing his own death-warrant; while, flushed with triumph, Paolo recalled Le Beaufort's messenger, and bade him inform his master that his enemies were unwilling he should perjure himself, and therefore requested him to have his keys in readiness to deliver to the Duke of Romagna on the following day.

"And add to the good knight," said Vitellozzo, gloomily, "that I receive him into my brotherhood, and will see all his conditions kept, an if God gives me grace to live so long."

CHAPTER XIII.

"We'll mock the time with fairest show ;
Fair face must hide what the false heart does know."
SHAKSPERE.

Of all those who were astonished and alarmed at the conclusion of the peace and dismissal of the French, none was more so than the Florentine secretary. His fears were kept continually on the stir by the messages passing between the camps, and by mysterious movements of troops, which appeared and disappeared, whence and whither no man knew. After vainly sounding all indirect channels, a report that Cæsar was about to join the army of the confederates at Sinigaglia excited his worst fears; which were confirmed when, contrary to his custom, the duke refused him an audience until the following day, at dawn, immediately before his departure to Sinigaglia.

It may therefore be conjectured that the envoy was prompt to the hour named for his audience ; and he was admitted to Cæsar's presence before the sun appeared, though the sky was lighted up. He was in a little cabinet, clad in a cuirass of so light and ductile a mail that it was not visible under the satin doublet

which he subsequently assumed. Eight persons were in attendance, one of whom was Don Migueloto; and the rest were all captains high in his command, or principal officers of his household.

"Give you good day, Messer Niccolò di Bernardo Machiavelli," said Cæsar, laughingly. "I doubt I have roused you before the fallow-deer, albeit they say the first gleam in the glades startles them. Break your fast with me—here are figs, grapes, bread, and Falernian—mark you, a learned wine. But who hath forewarned you of a journey, that you are ready equipped for one?"

"Signor, if the person of your excellence is to be put into Orsini hands, the ambassador of Florence has no longer any office near it," replied Machiavelli.

"Dost thou fear a muzzled bear, Niccolò?" said the duke, thoughtfully. "And Paolo Orsino, limber and strong as he is, will be little better between these two stout gentlemen of the Savelli name, dispossessed by his uncle, Virginio, of their fief on Tiber. The bull-calf, Vitellozzo, is unruly—but John of Augsburg and Philip the Swiss will hold him in a halter he shall not easily break. The Duke of Gravina is old, and therefore Monsignor d'Enna, though a priest, aided by my master of the household, may contrive between them to keep him in order. Oliverotto—nay, Migueloto and Don Ugo, ye must call upon the flimsy ghost of his old butchered uncle to help you lead him to his doom."

"But, signor, what may this avail, surrounded by their host—the remotest at scarce an hour's summons?" exclaimed the Florentine.

"Between life and death there is not an instant, Niccolò," replied the duke sombrely. "An hour!—'tis long enough for the destruction of the whole human race, had we but the means in our hands—as I have for theirs in mine. And whose maxims do I practise—crushing whom I have provoked; striking suddenly, and but one blow; rooting out, not lopping mine enemies—when I rid me, to-day and for ever, of the obstacles to my greatness, your republic of her deadliest foes, and deprive my haters in Rome of their sole balance against me—yea, compel them, in their own defence and preservation, to drink as deeply in the quaff of vengeance and blood?"

Messer Niccolò glanced with an expression of awe at his terrific pupil; but to a politician deeply imbued with the maxims of Italian state-craft, a patriot and a republican who keenly recollected the ravages which the Orsini and Vitelli had wrought in Tuscany, and their object to restore the splendid tyranny of the Medici, the treachery mingled in the draught but little marred the sweetness of its flavour. Moreover, Messer Niccolò felt that no hesitation would be permitted in him after such a confidence.

"The republic will indeed light bonfires in pyramids to hear such news, instead of the despondence I thought to be obliged to carry home, signor," he said. "I crave your excellency's permission to be of your retinue, that I may faithfully report tidings so musical in Florence. But, signor, far, far indeed, have you surpassed in contrivance him whom you deign to style your master, since even mine imagination cannot devise how you project to destroy these

traitors, surrounded by their victorious and well-paid mercenaries."

"Come hither—to this window, where in my noonday rests I studied and digested all, gazing at the statue of Fortune in yonder fountain, and the triumphal arch of Augustus Cæsar beyond it. But fall what may," continued the Borgia, his eyes scintillating with the fervour of the passions stirred within his soul; "fall what may, I must on, and cannot and will not back, though I should find the Metauro rolling with flames instead of water. I tell thee, all is won or lost to-day; and I will not forfeit my hopes in it for a saint's diadem in bliss. But toss down a goblet and finish your grapes, for we must to horse ere the sun looks too revealingly down upon our enterprise."

The matters debated between Cæsar and the Florentine secretary need not be detailed, as they were put so soon in action; but the day was still in its serene and beautiful dawn when the Duke of Romagna, attended by Messer Niccolò, the fatal eight, and a slender guard of cavalry, rode out of Fano.

One of his apprehensions vanished from Messer Niccolò's mind when, reaching the banks of the Metauro, he beheld Cæsar's army drawn up in array. His surprise at its great number betrayed itself in his eager question to the duke by what magic he had procured them, when no man suspected him to possess one-third the force, and of those the greater part were blocked up in fortresses.

"The fortresses can look to themselves, since we are between them and any assailant," replied Cæsar.

"They were to me what the clefts and hollows of the mountains are to the torrent, when it prepares its strength secretly in snow and ice; only I calculated to the instant the general thaw and flow, which the unreasoning warmth doth blindly with its streams."

The passage of the river was immediately commenced, the infantry crossing by a bridge, the cavalry by a ford; and Machiavelli, keeping near the duke, continued to show his calmness by relating that it was in this very river, now so clear and full of trout, that Asdrubal the brother of Hannibal was overthrown and perished.

"I would it still ran dark red with the African blood!" said Cæsar, suddenly and fiercely interrupting Machiavelli's historical reminiscences. "This tranquillity is at discord with my soul—but I shall be merrier anon, for the way hence to Sinigaglia is very gloomy and sad."

And so it proved; the remaining ten miles of the road to the fated city stretched along the sea-shore —barren and melancholy sands hemmed in by the bases of mountains scantily decorated with herbage, and stunted forests whose wild arms stretched all in one direction from the sea, as if imploring aid from its violence. Sometimes these hills receded into dreary downs covered with black sea-weed, shells, and all the litter of ocean; at others, advanced so far that the road winding at their bases was washed by the waves. The incessant roar of the sea, though then in one of its calmer moods, harmonized not ill with dark meditations, but it had a singular effect in enlivening those of Cæsar. His gaiety bordered

on wildness; he galloped frequently into the frothy waters as if to enjoy their turbulence and confused rush around him; and when his horse stooped to drink at the wave, and started back from its bitterness, he laughed aloud, and declared that henceforth he would call him Orso.

It had been agreed that the barons were to resign the city of Sinigaglia to Cæsar and his escort, quartering the principal mass of their own troops in the villages beyond. But to secure themselves against all danger, Oliverotto da Fermo occupied a suburb towards Fano, called Il Borgo, which was separated from the walls of the city by a river. This was crossed by a narrow bridge nearly opposite the town-gates; and a squadron of Cæsar's men-at-arms, duly instructed, who headed his advance, on reaching this bridge, as if to enter the city, made a sudden halt, wheeled, and opened their ranks.

Learning from this circumstance the approach of their visitor, the barons prepared to mount, and ride forth and welcome him. Paolo's gaiety was remarkable, and he was arrayed in very gorgeous armour, with a white plume mingling once more with his own flame-tints. But the qualms of Vitellozzo had returned, and he was dressed with strange carelessness, without armour, and with a cap of green velvet set on his head in a dejected droop very contrary to the hopefulness the colour was meant to indicate. And now when he observed the masses of spearmen hastening over the bridge into Sinigaglia, whose visages and accoutrements were all strange to him, he turned restive again, and firmly refused to

advance unless Oliverotto remained in the Borgo, and assembled his German lances to guard against any treachery. In vain did Paolo labour, even against the strange thoughts which arose in his own mind, to persuade him that the peaceful passage of so great a host showed plainly that no evil could be projected. Vitellozzo was obstinate, and Oliverotto, who was his pupil and strongly attached to him, took his old commander's side; so that finally it was agreed to leave the Lord of Fermo at his post.

Attended by a small troop of horsemen, the Duke of Gravina, Vitellozzo, and Paolo rode forth; but when they had passed the river, and the approach of the duke was visible, the burly chieftain trembled as if in an ague, and turned lividly pale. Paolo, who was watching him uneasily, said with a smile, "You are chilly out of armour, Vitellozzo; for though I have seen you in some bloody fields, I never saw you tremble in that."

"I feel even now at heart as my brother of thy name, Paolo, told me he felt that day we returned to Florence, and the ungrateful butchers slaughtered him," said Vitellozzo, almost inarticulately. "And yet—would to all saints, that instead of to meet this man, I were about to face the whole city of Florence, with their sharp-nailed women into the bargain."

"'Tis a vain augury, Vitellozzo; for thou knowest I am something of a sallow, melancholy mood, and yet to-day I feel as if my body had wings, and

my steed and I were dancing in the air," said Paolo, making his horse indeed give an airy vault.

At that very instant Cæsar had discerned their approach, and turning to Machiavelli, he said, "Now, look if thou canst discern any tint of the eternal darkness on these men's faces that stand on the brink of it, for, by heaven, thine has caught the dull leaden colour of the ocean we have coasted!"

Machiavelli smiled and roused himself, but his heart beat thickly in his bosom. The chieftains, however, approached, and Cæsar, waving his hand delightedly, spurred forward to meet them. "I am happy once again!—my paladins are restored to me!" he exclaimed, embracing Paolo, who was the foremost, in his arms, and saluting the two older warriors with more respect but extreme cordiality. "Illustrious Gravina! whom I may well call my father since he is Paolo's.—Vitellozzo!—Oh, I have missed thy towering form from my line of war.—But where is my valiant 'Liverotto?"

"Signor, he is busied drawing up our little retinue to welcome you," replied Vitellozzo, eagerly.

"Why—that is well," returned the duke, and his eye fell upon Don Migueloto with an expression which the castellain understood as well as any words; and while Cæsar renewed his greetings to the barons he glided quietly forward.

Cæsar protracted his inquiries and compliments until he imagined that the castellain had time to execute his purpose, and then, affecting much weari-

ness, he requested his hosts, as he called them, to lead him to his lodgings in Sinigaglia.

Meanwhile Migueloto rode into the open square of the Borgo, in which he found Oliverotto forming his troops in array.

"Signor," he said, after a brief salute, "I am sent to desire you to return your soldiers into their lodgments, for the duke fears lest his men, finding them unoccupied, should seize them, whence may arise some sudden and dangerous tumult, for ours are raw and unaccustomed fellows. Wherefore, I pray you, order the Germans into their quarters, and follow me to the duke's presence, who swears he misses you more than he rejoices in all he has found."

This flattering bait, and the tranquillity with which everything proceeded, won the Lord of Fermo into immediate compliance. The Germans, alarmed at the peril which their lodgings ran, eagerly obeyed his dismissal; and Oliverotto blithely spurred on to meet the duke. Don Ugo de Cordova rode up to him with renewed salutations as he approached, and between him and the castellain the Lord of Fermo continued his advance.

Cæsar was soon visible, complacently riding abreast with Paolo, and laughingly telling him that the two Savelli, who rode beside him, hoped by their courtesy to win the restoration of their little fief on Tiber—at which they also smiled, though gloomy men. The Duke of Gravina followed, in condescending discourse with Monsignor d'Enna and the major-domo;

and after them came Vitellozzo, between two stout Swiss captains, who attentively watched him from under their fierce bushy eyebrows. But the Lord of Castello scarcely noticed them, absorbed in a resolution which he had formed of inventing some excuse to remain out of Sinigaglia, as soon as he arrived among Oliverotto's troops.

The increase of Vitellozzo's alarm may be imagined when he saw the Borgo completely deserted, and beheld Oliverotto dismounting to receive the duke.

"Ah, thou art fairly out of thy mourning weeds?" said Cæsar, smiling at the chieftain's gay attire.

"Signor, this is but an old suit—ay, indeed, 'tis that in which I sat at the banquet when the tumult rose in which my uncle was unfortunately slain!—but 'tis a year agone," replied Oliverotto, somewhat confusedly.

"I am glad of it—very glad—glad you have a friend to plead for you in paradise, for I have heard he was a good old man," said Cæsar, with singular emphasis. "But now lead the way; ye shall *all* feast with me to-night."

"I crave your grace to pardon me; I have a strange chill in my blood, for 'tis months since I stirred without armour," said Vitellozzo.

"At least you must all accompany me to my lodgment, for men's eyes are upon us," said Cæsar. "Moreover, I would consult ye what to do with the daring boy who tore San Leo from me, and forsooth will yield the keys of Sinigaglia to none but me." And he spurred on, seeming scarcely to hear

what Vitellozzo said, until he had brought up the rear of that doomed procession which passed under the gate of Sinigaglia.

"My word is plighted in yours, Vitellozzo—why, it is very true; and as ye keep it, so will I," said Cæsar. "But is the fall he gave you in the Colosseum so all-forgotten, then?"

"Your grace must forgive him a heavier offence, an you let him go free and unscathed, as he demands," said Paolo, passionately.

"Nay—heavier?—Vitellozzo is good weight," replied the duke, laughingly. "But 'tis well minded—where is young Fabio?"

"We cannot wean him from his books—but I warrant me he is feigning to observe the German discipline with Oliverotto's bands," said the Duke of Gravina, testily. "The monks made a fool of me to let him learn his letters; but if I have a hundred grandchildren, not one of them shall know more Latin than will draw his sword."

"My sister is learned; she will not let you have your way, signor," said Cæsar, with a subtle smile. "But concerning this Englishman;—what says our valiant and experienced Oliverotto?"

"Keep as much faith with him, my lord, as will hang him from yonder tower!" replied the Lord of Fermo, pointing to the castle whose battlements towered above the palace which Cæsar was to occupy.

"In very troth, signor, his treason to my son deserves no better," said the Duke of Gravina.

"Treason for treason! fie, what moral were that?"

said Cæsar, gravely. "But yonder black pile is to be my lodging—yea, by the standard waving—out of a chimney, is it? Why, then, since ye all seem weary too, we will but pledge the continuance of this dear love and confidence in the same bowl, and then separate until the morrow."

"Signor, I pray you—I do fear some quarrel among the soldiery," said Vitellozzo, although the community of drink suggested removed any fear of poison.

"I hold myself but as your guest in Sinigaglia," said Cæsar, somewhat imperiously. "And if ye will not welcome me to my lodging, I will escort you back to yours, that gazers may not report we parted coldly."

Vitellozzo glanced back, and beheld the solid mass of spears which intervened between himself and the Borgo; and with a deep sigh he joined the rest, who had dismounted to escort Cæsar to his apartment. Entering the hall, he paused dejectedly for an instant on the threshold, and his eye fell on the Florentine envoy.

"Ser Niccolò," he said, eagerly pressing towards the secretary, who followed Cæsar, "it joys me to meet you here. I pray you sup with us to-night, and we will hope to clear all clouds of our intentions from your mind."

"Signor!—now heaven forbid that I should sup with you to-night!" repeated the envoy, startled with his own thought mingling in the invitation, which was uttered with solemnity in the speaker's earnestness, and more like a summons than an invitation.

As he spoke they entered a large, gloomy chamber, with grated windows, hung with tapestry, in which were wrought unnumbered elephants and roses, the armorial bearings of the Malatesta family, to whom the palace formerly belonged. Vitellozzo was somewhat comforted to find that the only person in the chamber was the negro, Zeid; and yet his large white eyes gazing upon them as they entered were instinct with a strange expression of bloodthirsty eagerness.

"Wine, wine!" exclaimed Cæsar, and the negro darted forward with a golden goblet and a large crystal jug, which he presented kneeling to the duke.

"How chances it thou art my cupbearer?" said Cæsar, filling the goblet to the brim, and glancing round the group which had collected in a respectful circle about him. "We are to be one another's tasters," he continued, and his ready instruments looked at him like hounds in the leash. At this moment he noticed that Vitellozzo started, and following the direction of his eye, saw that it rested on the point of a steel boot projecting from beneath the tapestry. There was no time to be lost, and raising the goblet, Cæsar exclaimed "Perdition to all traitors!" and tossed it high in the air. Simultaneously each of the chieftains found his arms clutched on both sides, and as the goblet fell, the tapestry was torn down by a rush of armed men from behind, who, before a single word was spoken, surrounded the group with levelled spears.

"Ay, perdition to all traitors! and where are any blacker than ye?" shouted Cæsar, laughing with

frantic exultation at his amazed and terror-stricken guests. "Ursine bears, old and young! bull of Castello! wolf of Fermo! I have trapped ye all."

"Did I not tell thee, Paolo?" said Vitellozzo, with the calm of utter despair.

"But it cannot be! it is impossible! Cæsar can execute none of his projects without our aid!" said Paolo, staring incredulously at the two Savelli, who now with unrestrained ferocity flourished their daggers in his face.

"Then were Cæsar ever your slave; but to do without ye, alas! I must begin, and that very briefly," said Cæsar, with ironical fierceness. "Nay, look not back, Vitellozzo—only your executioner is there."

"My lord, of your mercy I pray you to consider that all I have done against you was in gratitude for many signal favours from Vitellozzo," said Oliverotto, staring aghast from his master to his capturer.

"Villain! and what gratitude didst thou show to thine aged uncle, when thou didst brain him at the feast he made in thine honour?" said Cæsar. "Lo, now, thou hast not well worn the shoes in which thou trampledst his grey hairs, and thou shalt die in them! Lead them to prayers, until I have taken order with the rebellious slaves who abet them."

"Yet hear me—but one word, Cæsar Borgia!" exclaimed Paolo desperately. "Nay, thou shalt hear me. Condemn me to what shameful death thou wilt, but spare my father and my young brother, whom my madness has brought to this dread pass! Spare them, and I will plead thy pardon at the bar before which thy treachery sends me!"

"It were wise policy, indeed, to lop the branches and leave the trunk," returned Cæsar, scornfully. "There is not one of you, old or young, but is a foul traitor, oppressor, ravager, and murderer, and that shall not die the death of one!"

"May, then, my curse overtake thee at thy loftiest pinnacle of hope and power, and sit heavier on thee than thy brother's blood, and damn thee below Cain, thy prototype!" yelled the infuriate Orsino, making a wild effort to spring at his betrayer; but the Savelli locked him too firmly in their arms.

"I have slept calmly under a mountain of Colonna curses, and deem not the Orsini's ascend nearer Heaven," replied Cæsar, laughing. "Away with them!"

"But one prayer let me make which concerns my soul, not body," said Vitellozzo, strangely subdued, and yielding to the superstition which was perhaps at the root even of his rebellious audacity. "His holiness has been pleased to excommunicate me. Promise me, Cæsar, to obtain my pardon and remission, at least in that other world."

"By'r Lady, I doubt if he will forgive thee even there!—'twas thou who prated to strip him of his robe and burn him, on a plea which leaves thee little hope of Madonna Lucrezia's intercession," replied Cæsar, repeating his absolute "Away with them!"

Each of the betrayed and doomed men was sternly commanded by his capturers to walk; and Paolo mechanically advanced a few steps, and then looked back at his father with a heart-rending expression. The aged duke had been as if petrified with amaze-

ment during the scene, but the glance restored him to consciousness and to his natural pride and fierceness.

"Hellish Borgia! priest's bastard! dost thou dare to dream to shed the blood of the Orsini and Vitelli?" he shouted, trembling with rage and infirmity rather than with fear. "Remember, villain and base-born traitor, that for every drop in my veins there lives an avenger, who will pour the last of his own ere he sits down to smile on the recollection of this treason unmatched since Rome was Roman!"

"Old man, you threaten well; I must have Fabio, too," said Cæsar, calmly. "But to content ye, I will shed no drop of any of your most noble and most lawful blood; for I will strangle ye all like the common thieves, marauders, and pillagers which ye are, and have been during all the ages ye vaunt yourselves to have been nobles and princes of Italy!"

The raging exclamations of the old duke, the abject beseechings of Oliverotto, were soon hurried out of hearing; but the terrific silence and glance of Paolo Orsino at his betrayer, as he left the chamber with his guard, long haunted Messer Niccolò's meditations.

"This is the revenge which I promised thee in Imola I would take on the enemies of the signory, master secretary," said Cæsar, again laughing in the frantic excess of his triumph. "I have others of mine own in Rome, who will quake to hear of it, and whose dance commences to the music of these villains' dying groans. But now, if thou hast courage to see thy theories in practice, come with me, and behold the destruction of the barbarians in the Borgo."

While these events were enacted in the city of Sinigaglia, Le Beaufort was making preparations to evacuate the citadel, stung to the heart by the reply brought to his offer of surrender; for he had hoped that his repentance and exertions in the cause of the confederacy might have mollified his former friend. But finding that it was impossible for him to resist or escape, he was compelled to abide by his own stipulation, with a great increase of anguish at the thought of his humiliation before his insolent enemy, the Duke of Romagna; and, but for Vitellozzo's assurance, not without much doubt of his safety.

From the summit of his tower he witnessed the entry of Cæsar with the barons, and when they were fairly housed he retired to continue his preparations for the evacuation, which he supposed would be immediately demanded. Accordingly, it was not noticed that Cæsar suddenly re-appeared from the palace, mounted his horse, and rode out with all his cavalry into the Borgo, which was now hemmed in by his troops in the rear. The German ritters, separated from each other, and intent only on keeping their quarters, were easily overpowered, and a bloody massacre commenced. Meanwhile the army in Sinigaglia was to advance with Don Migueloto to the attack of the remoter cantonments of the barons. But fortunately for them, the soldiers in Sinigaglia imagined that they had a right to share the plunder enjoyed by their comrades in the suburb, and began to sack the city.

The uproar below brought Le Beaufort again to

his battlements, and he conjectured that some tumult had arisen between the citizens and their conquerors. This notion was confirmed when at length Cæsar re-appeared in the confusion, and in his fury was observed to slay several of the marauders with his own hand. But night darkened over the city ere the tumult seemed altogether appeased; and then Le Beaufort received intimation by a herald that the lieutenant of the church awaited to receive the keys of Sinigaglia from his hand.

Disdaining to use a golden ewer which the Lady of Sinigaglia had given him, and which Bampton advised him to take for the purpose, Sir Reginald put the keys in his helmet, and rode out of the castle attended only by a single archer. He left Bampton with instructions not to surrender the citadel until he returned in person to give the order; for although the old man rejoiced infinitely in the conclusion which his master's Italian warfare must now reach, Sir Reginald knew that his firmness and fidelity were not to be shaken.

Le Beaufort expected to be led into some "feasting presence" of his enemies, and to run the gauntlet of their mockery. It was therefore with great and visible surprise that he found himself ushered into the presence of Cæsar, alone in the devastated chamber which was the scene of the surprisal, and restlessly pacing up and down.

And his reception by Cæsar was very different from what he had anticipated. "Welcome, Orlando! welcome, Sir Launcelot! or rather, welcome all the

paladins and Knights of the Round Table in one," he exclaimed, seizing Le Beaufort's gauntleted hands in his own.

"Signor, I am none of these, but the captain of Sinigaglia, who brings you her keys as lieutenant of the church, whose arms I may no longer resist," replied the young knight, coldly, and presenting the helmet with few marks of the respect and ceremonial to be expected from the vanquished.

"Ay!—but he, too, must learn manners in my school," said Cæsar aloud, but as if speaking to himself, and continuing with a smile—"My jest still smarts in thy recollection. And in truth we should not scratch when we tickle. But I have learned to value thee better, even in the harms which thou hast done me; and if thou wilt become my captain thou shalt hang the keys of a nobler town than these paltry fishing-huts at thy girdle to-night."

"Henceforth, my lord, I think to serve no master under the majesty of a king," returned Le Beaufort, haughtily.

"Even there is the kernel of my thought.—Thou shalt serve one greater than that name—an emperor!—a Roman emperor!" replied Cæsar, with a flashing glance at the surprised warrior. "An emperor that must be made one by swords as tried and ready as thine—and who, as he owes all, will pay all, to their wielders."

"A Roman emperor!—are Maximilian and the German Ghibellines summoned by the Guelfs to Italy?" said Sir Reginald, now much amazed.

"Canst thou rave this, and look upon mine axe, which is thus toothed with hacking out the thick brains of Oliverotto's Rhenish robbers?" returned Cæsar, raising a weapon on which he was leaning, the broad edge of which was indeed covered with disgusting clots of blood and yellow pulp.

"Methought I beheld some plunderers at work, whom you rightfully suppressed—but what emperor can this be, unless the King of the Romans comes to Rome to claim the imperial crown?" said the knight, a dim suspicion darting into his mind.

"Nay!—but thou wilt believe in no emperor but one with a crown on his head, northman," replied Cæsar, somewhat contemptuously. "Yet must I be plain with thee. The plunderers whom I slew were of mine own host—but for whose mutiny not a Ghibelline of Oliverotto's Germans had escaped the doom which the majority have suffered. But, as thou sayest, the crown is in Rome, and thither an emperor goes to claim it, whose name is—and whose deeds perchance may be — an echo of the first Cæsar's."

After a pause of utter astonishment, and indeed somewhat of awe at the grandeur of the ambition thus revealed, Sir Reginald replied with evident incredulity — "Your highness jests with my dull northern wit again. Albeit his holiness dearly cherishes your person, what pope will endure an emperor in Rome?"

"But what if the question be reversed—what emperor will endure a pope in Rome?" replied Cæsar,

calmly. "And so methinks it may be when with my potent and victorious and Italian legions I enter Rome, which I purpose within this calend."

"To dethrone our holy father in Rome!—which the accursed Turk and paynim would scarcely dream!" exclaimed Le Beaufort.

"Thou superstitious tramontane!—But, in truth, my holy father, and Lucrezia's holy father—and thine, yes, thine, if thou wilt and darest!" said Cæsar, vehemently. "But I speak not to dethrone —but to resume the imperial seat, which priests have so long usurped, and standing, they may recover their ancient humility and holiness, of which they have for ages retained only the title. What sayest thou? In what is Alexander so dear and sacred to thee that thou shouldst fear to follow in aught I may project against his sway?"

"But what say the Orsini, and the Vitelli, and the rest of your highness's new allies? Do they prefer the strong dominion of a soldier to the faint mastery of a priest?" said the still more astonished knight.

"I trust to secure at least their silent acquiescence," returned Cæsar, with a slight laugh. "Or hast thou forgotten that Paolo Orsino loves Lucrezia Borgia (who is so soon to be Lucrezia of Este), and would give back the universe to chaos to preserve her from the arms of her loved Alfonso?"

"And has your highness consented to—to what?" exclaimed Le Beaufort, turning very pale, a circumstance attentively noted by the Borgia.

"I have sworn to him, and must either keep my

word or destroy its claimant, to cause Lucrezia to be detained on the bridal progress, which she has already commenced, on her passage through Romagna, and to confer her upon him as the price and security of his assistance in my enterprise," said Cæsar.

"Then, Duke Cæsar, by all that is sacred, if aught be deemed so by the Italians, I will not aid, but will rather battle to the death against you and him, and all your felon powers!" exclaimed the knight.

"Thou talkest dangerously for thyself," replied Cæsar, but quite placidly, and even contentedly. "Knowest thou not thou art in my power, knight, and that I have trusted thee too far, unless thou art wholly mine?"

"The Vitelli and Orsini, and even the ruffian of Fermo, have promised the observation of my terms," said Sir Reginald, not without alarm at this insinuation.

"But I have not," said Cæsar, demurely. "And for the Vitelli, they are out of the way to render thee any aid; and the Orsini and Oliverotto are eager for me to violate the compact with thy destruction."

"Recreant and disloyal nobles! Give me at least vengeance in death, signor, by suffering my challenge to meet them all at once, and let them take my life with their own hands!" said Le Beaufort, furiously.

"Thou shalt have vengeance even as thou ragest, but two of them will soon be beyond thy reach, and let us hope in a better place than this earth of ours," said Cæsar, gaily. "Yet, hark, that sounds not like the prayer of a Christian soul departing!"

A yell was suddenly heard in an adjoining apartment—a trample, and rapid struggle, or rather flutter, and then there was deep silence.

"The parricide of Fermo is gone to face his ancient uncle," continued the duke, calmly. "There is justice as well as policy in my doings; and now one mutters a distracted paternoster! Is that voice unknown to thee?"

"Vitellozzo's!" exclaimed Sir Reginald.

"Hush, or he may think it is the fiend calling him, being an excommunicated wretch!" said Cæsar.

There was another direful pause, and then a door was opened slightly ajar, and the unsightly head of a negro projected, which gave a significant nod to the duke, and was instantly withdrawn.

"Peace to their traitorous souls, I grudge not that," said Cæsar, jeeringly. "Murderers and oppressors, who says they are not well gone, or that treachery can be against wolves and tigers?"

Perhaps for the first time in his life the courage of Le Beaufort gave way; his hair bristled, and his knees knocked together, as he said, "What is within there, my lord? It cannot be that the Vitelli is slain!"

"Come, then, and believe in thine own eyes," said Cæsar, snatching a lamp from the table, and leading the way with rapid strides to the door at which the negro had appeared. It opened into a narrow courtyard, surrounded by lofty buildings, in which were several soldiers and the negro, busily engaged, while Migueloto held a lamp, in stripping the bulky carcass of a man. The light falling on the ghastly and dis-

torted visage, revealed the features of Vitellozzo, and the means of his death in the handkerchief knotted in a peculiar manner round his neck. At a little distance lay another corpse, which was partially thrust into a sack, but enough was visible to show that it was all that remained of the Lord of Fermo.

"Signor! the Lord Paolo, is he too dead?" gasped Le Beaufort.

"I but reserve him and his sire until I receive certain news of the seizure of the whole brood in Rome, and capture of Fabio Orsino, who most lucklessly was dreaming in a wood over his Petrarca, for he left the book behind him in his flight," said Cæsar, gloomily. "But when the cardinal and the rest are captured, I will necessitate their doom by slaying these in my hands, for I love them no more than thou, and have as little cause. Or if thou misdoubt that I still keep terms with Lucrezia's would-be bridegroom, come with me."

He led the way across the court to a tower which was based in it, and ascended by a flight of narrow stairs to a chamber, barred within, and guarded without. He knocked, the door was opened by the two Savelli, and followed all dreamily and mechanically by Le Beaufort, he entered.

The first object the latter discerned was Paolo Orsino, seated in chains, gazing vacantly at a lamp which was placed on the floor for lack of any other stand, and which cast dark upward shadows on his pallid visage.

"Is it the executioner?" he said, without looking round.

"It should be; but it is the captain of Sinigaglia, with his keys," replied Cæsar, merrily; and staring round, Paolo perceived his former friend. "Thou didst desire his destruction at mine hand; now wouldst thou he should share thine own, or change fates with thee, which, as I live, I have resolved."

"What fate shall he change with me?" exclaimed the Orsino, with a strangely wild eagerness, the last clutch of hope.

"Thou seest, Reginald, how willingly he yields thee up to doom," said Cæsar. "But I speak not of the fate which thy fellow-traitors have but now undergone, and thou mightst have heard the big Vitello's struggle—but of that which thou didst project for thyself in Faenza, revelling in the unmatched beauties of Lucrezia, regardless of her hatred and assured resistance, which with this fair knight is not so much to be feared."

"Ha, traitor, ha! wild beast of humanity!" shouted the prisoner, furiously. "I care not for thy fiendish eyes, and I will tell thee, Englishman, that he lures thee to destruction with the bribe that brought me hither, promising that at Faenza—oh fool, oh idiot without a fool's sense!—at Faenza he would intercept Lucrezia on her way to Ferrara, and make her—oh, beast, beast—but *not* Alfonso's bride!"

"And where shall I find a bolder heart to execute such an enterprise than beats in Sir Reginald's breast?" replied Cæsar, sedately. "And being the renowned soldier that he is, potently allied in his native land, whence I can draw the valiant swords I need; no brother of the mighty rebels, Este or Orsino,

not altogether unloved by Lucrezia;—I speak now a thought which hath long worked in my heart,—of all the suitors whom Lucrezia hath or had he were the least dangerous, and most acceptable to me. And by the light of heaven!—nay, I will swear by nought but the power I will put into his hands, if he dare undertake the office, from this instant he is my captain in Faenza."

"Speak, Sir Reginald, thou canst not refuse so fair a bait," said Paolo, laughing hoarsely.

"Nay, Sir Reginald, for thou shalt learn that I have as much need of thee as thou canst have of me in it," said Cæsar, with a look of devouring hate at his shackled victim. "Lucrezia must not to Ferrara, and yet, until I am master in Rome I dare not avow that my decree detains her at Faenza. Thy love for her is known, Le Beaufort, and 'tis by many thought, even by thy haughty rival, that she stands not ill-affected towards thee. Wherefore in Rome I can plead an insolent mutiny on thy part, and to the world, and to Alfonso of Ferrara, matters which shall balk his longings even for so fair a bride. Thy valour, and some wrong I have done thee, pleads my excuse to make thee now mine officer in so great a trust as that strongest city of my dominion; and strange it will be, if, with the gloss of thy renown upon thee, melting memories of the past, and all her bride's longings baffled and glowing in blood so warm—ay, strange it will be if thou canst not win her to admit a suit which I will also urge, or perchance, when I have gained full mastery, compel."

"Listen to the syren but an instant, and thou art

lost," said Paolo, and yet gazing with something of jealous rage and doubt from the tempter to Le Beaufort. "Let me perish without even that sole hope which yet remained to me, that in thy remorse I should find an avenger, for thou hast brought me hither!—I could have borne aught but to see her in his arms! Hadst thou but hinted the truth of the Ferrarese I could have early taught my soul despair, shunned all the Borgian pitfalls, and known them for such! What had I done to thee that thou shouldst shed thy friend's blood, and guard thy rival and enemy from every harm?"

Deeply affected as he was with this appeal, Sir Reginald felt the necessity of counterfeiting a very different emotion, and he exclaimed, with seemingly bewildered eagerness of joy, "Let the losing gamester rave! but could I believe such happiness no dream, Cæsar, I were indeed your bondslave for ever!"

"Then is he lost, for he knows not how to feign!" groaned the Orsino.

"Yet didst thou call me traitor when I yielded to what was then a vague and air-built hope, Orsino!" returned Le Beaufort, with a glance so full of some unuttered meaning that Paolo started and looked at him stedfastly. "And now, when the sunshine hardens into diamond, wouldst thou have me hold back my hand from the prize?"

"Thou art captain of Faenza even now; and its prince that day which crowns me emperor in Rome," said Cæsar, unnoticing this mute dialogue in his exultation.

"And wilt thou become, then, this monstrous, unknightly villain and ravisher?" said the Orsino, in a low, but yet staggered tone.

"Wouldst thou not have been all, and more, for she never but loathed thy love?" returned Le Beaufort, and Cæsar laughed aloud.

"Fairly answered! let us leave him now to crack the nuts of his recollections," said Cæsar. "We have no time to lose, for my advance on Rome will hasten her journey from it."

"Betide what will, Orsino, *vengeance at least is mine!*" said Sir Reginald, with another glance, which the Orsino seemed to understand, for a momentary joy lightened over his face, which he concealed from Cæsar by turning away as if in despair. "Vengeance! and let the remembrance of the oath with which I swear it, comfort—as it may—thy doom."

"Why, then, since thou goest to destruction, too, let us part as brothers in calamity," said the Orsino, stretching his chained arms as if in mockery of the supposed threat; but Le Beaufort, observing Cæsar's look, turned haughtily away, and raising the cross of his sword to his lips, kissed it in ratification of his secret oath, and said aloud, "In faith I have too lately escaped the bear's hug, to trust me again in it. My lord, lead on, for henceforth the business of my life is to fulfil the vengeance which I swear on the whole generation of the betrayers!"

In the intoxication of his triumph over the most sagacious politicians of Italy, and his knowledge of the mighty passion whose influence on Le Beaufort he had essayed, Cæsar could not doubt the success of

his artifices with the young barbarian. Yet he spent nearly the whole of the subsequent night in raising the most splendid visions of ambition and love in Sir Reginald's imagination, and in communications, in part real, of the vasty project he had formed. He assured Le Beaufort, with seeming earnestness, that as, in his intentions to seize on the supreme and undivided power in Rome, one of the greatest obstacles would be the pontiff's alliance with the potent house of Este, to prevent it was so great an object, that he should esteem Sir Reginald's success in his love-making the strongest augury of his own. Every facility should be afforded to him, and he stimulated the most vehement passions of the young knight by representing the many triumphs which converged into that delicious one of love, when after having vanquished his haughty rival in generosity and arms, he should also win his bride from him, even with her own consent. Lucrezia, he said, had probably already discovered that she had mistaken the awe and pique which the Hospitaller's insolent conduct had excited in her, for a passion which the more congenial nature of Sir Reginald was far more likely to kindle, and of which opportunity might enable him to convince her. Meanwhile, Cæsar must certainly be recalled to Rome by the disorders which would follow the tidings of the destruction of the rebels; and once in possession of the city, and of the vast treasures accumulated by the pontiff, he would have it in his power to accept the brother-in-law of his own and Lucrezia's choice.

When at length the crafty duke suffered Le Beaufort to retire, it was in the belief that he had dissipated every scruple in his breast, and converted him into an implicit and most necessary engine in his desperate policy.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Was not this love indeed?"
Twelfth Night.

The following day beheld Le Beaufort on his way to Faenza, accompanied by his own archers, but also by Peter of Oviedo, and the crafty Bishop of Enna, with a large body of men-at-arms devoted to the duke. These and the garrison of Faenza formed a powerful array, quite sufficient to secure the destined prey; but Le Beaufort was not to be installed in his captaincy until Lucrezia arrived and it was time for the plot to explode.

And thus Cæsar trusted but little to his new adherent's fidelity, although he gave him credit for no faculty of dissimulation; for it was apparently impossible for him to escape, or avoid executing the task imposed upon him. And in truth, when he arrived in Faenza, and found himself lodged in the keep of the ancient castle or palace of the Manfredi, under the vigilant surveillance of Monsignor d'Enna, and surrounded by the troops of Peter of Oviedo, he felt himself no less a prisoner than if he had been in chains. And yet he dared not even venture to ex-

plain his situation to Bampton, whose despair and indignation at the change in his lord's resolutions, and the new service he had taken, knew no bounds. But when Le Beaufort declared the fixedness of his determination, and bade the old man, if he pleased, return to England without him, his grief and wrath worked silently, and he followed Le Beaufort in a sullen submission, which yet restrained the discontent of the men-at-arms.

Having thus provided for this most extraordinary portion of his grand project, Cæsar seemed on a sudden to set in motion all the wheels and levers which had been so long combining in secrecy. Migueloto left Sinigaglia at the same time with Sir Reginald, to proceed to Rome, ostensibly with the news of the defeat of the Orsini, but in reality to execute the plans of Cæsar, and by reporting the dangerous state of the country, covered with the shattered, but not crushed partizans of the barons, to retard the progress of Lucrezia until matters were more ripe for her detention at Faenza. This result was, however, obtained without any necessity of taxing the exaggerative eloquence of Don Migueloto.

It is true that the pontiff, on the first receipt of Cæsar's tidings, seized, with circumstances of almost equal treachery, on all the members of the Orsini family in Rome, including the Cardinal and the Archbishop of Florence, and on their fortress palaces, which were stripped of all their rich contents; declared the estates of the whole family forfeit, and proceeded to ravage them with fire and sword, apparently at pleasure. But the return of Fabio

Orsino, who escaped by a miracle of chance from Sinigaglia, and the extraordinary valour and conduct displayed by the youth, suddenly revived the spirits and resolution of the partizans of his name. Cæsar himself was astonished with the tidings which reached him on his victorious advance, and it apparently suspended the Borgian resolutions; for he continued to spare the lives, or rather reserve the deaths, of Paolo and the Duke of Gravina, dragging them after him in chains; and Alexander contented himself with imprisoning his victims in Santangelo, permitting them various indulgences, and giving public assurances of their personal safety.

Meanwhile Cæsar lost not an instant in following up his projects, and the tremendous blow at Sinigaglia. He rushed upon Città-di-Castello, which the affrighted heirs of Vitellozzo instantly abandoned, and of which he took possession in the name of the church. At present he respected his treaty with Bologna, only compelling its lords to send him the large succours stipulated, which laid them bare for future attempts, and turned upon Perugia, whence the Baglioni fled in the like manner. Having secured this city with a garrison of his partizans and of factious exiles, he entered the territory of Sienna, and by his direful ravages forced the city to expel his enemy and its lord, Pandolfo Petrucci. But here he was met with such disastrous tidings of the progress of the Orsini, who were masters of the whole Campagna, and threatened Rome itself, that he was compelled to turn from his career of devastation and

conquest, and move with his army on Rome. His sudden arrival, it appeared from the confession of some prisoners, foiled a desperate attempt which Fabio Orsino meditated on Rome, to seize the persons of the pontiff and of his daughter, as hostages for his sire and brother's safety. This circumstance kindled Alexander's most violent passions; and when the Orsini, after some bloody struggles, were driven by Cæsar's overwhelming force to take refuge in their castles and fortresses—against the express commands of the King of France, who took Fabio under his protection, and Cæsar's own wish, he ordered him to besiege Bracciano with his whole force, in which Fabio had taken refuge. But Cæsar's policy had also borne its expected fruit in Naples, where the ill success of the French against the Spaniards rendered them more dependent on the goodwill of the pontiff than ever he had been on theirs; and he now utterly despised their entreaties, and even menaces, in behalf of the Orsini.

The news of the suppression of the Orsini revolt, and of the hopeless condition of their young chieftain, had not long reached Faenza ere tidings of the continued progress of Lucrezia were brought. Messengers arrived to hasten the preparations for her reception, and that of her magnificent retinue; and as Faenza was the last of the great cities belonging to the Borgias through which she was to pass, the extraordinary splendour of the rejoicings was accounted for, which was in reality devised as a means of detaining her. At the same time one of Cæsar's most

trusted emissaries, Don Ugo of Cordova, arrived with minute instructions to all the parties concerned in effecting the projected manœuvre.

Ferrara is distant from Faenza but one day's journey; and although the great strength of the city, which was completely and massively walled, numerously garrisoned, and provided with every munition of war, enabled it to defy violence, Cæsar's anxiety was directed to persuade the Prince of Ferrara, if possible, that his bride was not detained against her will. In addition to the festivities, which she could not graciously refuse to stay and witness, rumours were to be spread that the Vitelli had fled into the intervening country, under the secret protection of Bologna, and rendered it dangerous to attempt a passage until they were driven out. Meanwhile every artifice was to be exerted to amuse the attention of Lucrezia and her escort; and it was signified to Sir Reginald that, in the former office, the duke principally relied upon him.

And certes the struggle would have been more severe in Le Beaufort's heart, if his knowledge of Cæsar's unholy passion had not convinced him that it was impossible he could intend any success to his own. He felt that all his motions were incessantly watched, and that it was not meant to trust him with the least real power, which was all exercised by the Bishop of Enna and his own bitter enemy, Peter of Oviedo, whom he had deprived of San Leo, and who commanded in Faenza with the title of lieutenant and authority of chief. Moreover, Lucrezia's love for her betrothed husband could not

be doubted; and her ambition and pride were warmly engaged in favour of so great an alliance. And yet Sir Reginald found it utterly impossible, without exposing himself to sudden and useless destruction, to attempt warning Lucrezia of the pitfall laid for her. A jealous vigilance, justified by the disturbed state of the country, was exercised on all who passed in or out of Faenza; and its inhabitants themselves did not guess that they had a new governor within their walls; but rather concluded that the personage so closely pent up and guarded was a prisoner whose detention was of great consequence.

Le Beaufort himself could only form vacant hopes and resolutions to endeavour the balking of Cæsar's plots at every hazard, when the occasion should arrive; and meanwhile he laboured to remove suspicion by submitting to all that was demanded of him without impatience or struggle, as if lured by the glistering bait held out to him to slight all concomitant disadvantages. Nor had he any occasion to feign the passionate eagerness with which he awaited Lucrezia's arrival, and the delight, deeply mingled with perplexity and bitter regret as it must be, with which he anticipated beholding her once more.

At length the approach of the bridal company restored Sir Reginald to some degree of liberty; and on the morning of the day in which Lucrezia was expected in Faenza the English knight received his commission from Don Ugo, as its governor. Yet it was determined by the Bishop of Enna that it would be dangerous for Le Beaufort to appear until she was fairly within the walls; and the apology for

the absence of the governor might aptly introduce the subject of the dangers to be apprehended from the Vitelli fugitives, against which they might allege him to be engaged in providing.

In Faenza all was bustle and splendid preparation, and the Faventines vindicated their ancient character for taste and wealth in the welcome which they devised for the sister of their terrible lord. The streets by which she was to reach the palace were decorated with arches of flowers and bridal devices; the city resounded with the merry clamour of all its bells, joyful shouts, music, and continual peals of ordnance. The whole population poured forth in holiday garb, the beggars themselves bedizening their rags with bridal favours; and in the great square before the palace a vast feast was to be given to the people, with dances, plays, and the exhibitions of jongleurs and minstrels, all in the open air; and above all, to divert the bride and her ladies, a race of women was to take place, in which the prize was a white satin smock, and ten gold crowns as a marriage portion to the fair winner.

It was the noon of a glowing summer day when the arrival of two heralds, in the livery of the Dukes of Ferrara and of the Borgias, announced the approach of the bridal retinue. The curiosity of the populace assembled in the great square was somewhat diverted by the appearance of their new governor, who rode out of the castle with his English archers to receive the arriving guests. But they were disappointed in their intended survey, for he wore his visor down; yet the magnificence of his

armour and trappings excited great admiration, and gratified the eyes of the populace. With all his doubts and fears Sir Reginald could not deny himself the advantage which magnificence of garb lent to his noble person, but he persuaded himself that he took so much pains in his military toilet in pursuance of his plan to deceive his capturers.

The procession of the betrothed had entered the walls, and its pompous array shortly appeared descending the principal street from the gates, amidst thundering acclamations, triumphal music of trumpets and drums, and discharge of the small guns of the soldiery who lined the way. Le Beaufort was surprised and somewhat comforted to observe the number and perfect discipline of the Spanish archers and horsemen who formed the guard of the bride, and which also evidently made Monsignor d'Enna muse. These headed the procession, and so great a multitude of servants followed, well armed and in superb liveries, that the prelate's thoughtfulness increased. Then came a number of carriages, covered with costly cloths, containing the bride's wardrobe, and the rich presents made to her by her sire—above all, her dowry of one hundred thousand gold crowns, in specie, a sum which regal profusion had not emulated in those days. Then came a mule, which bore upon its back a couch with cushions, covered with crimson velvet embroidered with flowers, and with pillows of white satin; above which was borne a superb canopy of cloth of gold. In this the young duchess was to repose when wearied of riding on horseback; but she entered the city mounted on the

white steed which Le Beaufort full well remembered. It was superbly decorated, and she herself wore a magnificent bridal dress, principally composed of silver lace and diamonds wrought in a woof as splendid as if of figured light, with the exquisite skill for which the Italian artists, rather than manufacturers, of the age were renowned. Her face was nearly concealed by the bridal veil which hung to her feet, but its heightened fairness was visible beneath; and the light of the smile with which she bent to the uproarious greetings of the populace seemed like a sunshine piercing it.

Beside her rode the Cardinal of Este, Don Alfonso's brother and procurator, blazing in his scarlet robes; a number of ladies, nobles, knights, and other attendants, both of Rome and Ferrara, followed. But despite this great and gorgeous escort, Lucrezia visibly started when, entering the great square, she beheld the masses of soldiery drawn up to receive her, under her brother's ensigns. But Monsignor d'Enna was instantly beside her, offering the compliments and congratulations of the city; the fluttering of a number of snow-white doves, suddenly released from their cages, increased the confusion; and Lucrezia's attention was immediately caught by the approach of the captain of Faenza.

Something Le Beaufort spoke of compliment or welcome, in so low and confused a tone that Monsignor d'Enna observed in apology that the knight was a foreigner, when Lucrezia interrupted him. "Sir knight, it cannot be that we are so far mistaken as not to remember that voice!" she ex-

claimed. "And yet, in the service of the Duke of Romagna!—beseech you, raise your visor, and let us see if such witcheries may be."

Sir Reginald obeyed with a deep bend, and Lucrezia started at the pale and agitated countenance revealed, which she remembered blooming with youth and bounding blood. Nevertheless her whole countenance beamed with joy, and she said with a delight which went like a reproach to his heart—"Oh, then, I am all safe—and very, very happy!" and extended her hand with a smile of such absolute confidence and trust that he was nigh overcome with emotion as he bent to kiss it. Probably she felt the tremble on his lips, for the glance she gave him as she drew it back mingled much of her natural coquetry and vivacity, and shivered through the veins of the knight like a stream of lightning.

Monsignor d'Enna smiled quaintly at Don Ugo, and the procession was ordered to advance. On reaching the castle, the young duchess selected Le Beaufort to assist her in dismounting; and on entering its gloomy halls she looked at him with a shudder, and desired him not to leave her, in a tone which deepened all his inner anguish. But there was something probably in his hesitating and gloomy replies which gave her inquietude; for even on seating herself at the great banquet which had been prepared, she announced to the smiling and bending Monsignor d'Enna that she intended to resume her journey on the following day.

But the Cardinal of Este, a prelate of a good deal more wit than sanctity, laughingly commented on the

advantages of a little rest with such a journey before them, and more seriously declared that they must tarry the arrival of a messenger with tidings that all was in readiness in Ferrara. Lucrezia smiled and blushed, and the serenity returned to her most lovely visage. But it troubled over again as she turned to Sir Reginald, and addressing him as the captain of Faenza, inquired if it was true that the Vitelli were abroad, and ravaging the country towards Ravenna? Don Ugo prevented Sir Reginald's reply by giving a most alarming report of the disasters the rebels had caused, their great numbers, their vows of vengeance, and the secret assistance of the Bolognese. Lucrezia became very pale, and turning to the captain of Faenza, she desired him in an eager and almost imploring manner to wait on herself and the cardinal early on the following morning, to devise the measures necessary for her safe progress.

Something peculiar there must have been in Le Beaufort's look in reply to this command, which she probably mistook, as she coloured again very deeply, and the cardinal smiled significantly. This interchange of thought probably increased the trouble and anguish of Le Beaufort; for after regarding him stealthily for some moments, Lucrezia, for the first time, asked a question which had been for a long time on her lips, and inquired how it chanced that she beheld him in Faenza.

Again one of the ever-watchful coadjutors interposed, and Monsignor d'Enna launched into a high-flown panegyric on the matchless valour of the

English knight, which had led the Duke of Romagna not only to pardon the share he had taken in aid of his rebels, but to desire most earnestly to attach him to his own service.

"His deeds praise him better than your words, monsignor," said Lucrezia, watching with a woman's keenness of observation, and yet unobservedly, the flickering shades of contending passions in Le Beaufort's expression. "Yet I would fain hope that some memory of an ancient friendship worked full as strongly in his heart as any promises and protestations of the Duke of Romagna?"

Le Beaufort had by this time rallied sufficiently to endeavour to play his part; but he somewhat betrayed himself, when he replied with vehemence, "In Sinigaglia, lady, it surely needed some other spell than promises from his grace to win me. But," he added, more considerately, "the Orsini sought my destruction—and what mattered theirs to me?"

Shuddering at these words and the recollections it kindled, Lucrezia shifted the converse to another topic, and it soon became general and animated. The Cardinal of Este was himself a man of wit and observation, and in his train were several of the polished poets, courtiers, and learned men who made Ferrara famous. Bembo was there, whose platonism now merited the term, or at least had ebbed back to its ancient limits. And there was one Messer Ludovico Ariosto, a young man in the cardinal's service, whose pleasant humour and gaiety had already raised him high in .Donna Lucrezia's favour, who was said

to prefer the epithalamium he had written for her marriage to all the innumerable tribe of its competitors.

The day concluded in witnessing the diversions in the public square, and the display of fireworks; after which, renewing her command to see him early on the following morning, Lucrezia and her court retired to rest.

Le Beaufort anxiously awaited to hear what conclusions Cæsar's emissaries had drawn from the events of the day; and he found with satisfaction that they were alarmed at the number and strength of the bridal escort. Peter of Oviedo had indeed quartered the soldiery in isolated positions, where they might be easily overpowered by his superior force, if the necessity should arise. But their concern was betrayed by the general agreement in Monsignor d'Enna's proposal that Sir Reginald should see Donna Lucrezia without the presence of the Cardinal of Este, and while giving her a good excuse for delay in a frightful picture of the danger to be apprehended from the Vitelli, endeavour with his eloquence to render it palatable to her. Le Beaufort affected not to notice the sneer which mingled in Monsignor d'Enna's tone, but accepted the proposal with all the eagerness to be expected in a hopeful lover, and which Lucrezia's conduct to him somewhat justified in the envious opinion of the colleagues. The bishop had, in truth, received a last instruction from Lucrezia to bring the captain of Faenza to her presence as soon as the cardinal was ready to share the de-

liberation, and he agreed with Le Beaufort to make a mistake, and lead him to it alone.

In deciding on this point, however, Le Beaufort made a stipulation which, in his frank and daring temperament, seemed quite natural. He declared that if overlooked by any espial he should be unable to touch on the recollections which were likely to revive his former favour with Lucrezia, and promote their present views; and therefore he advised Monsignor d'Enna, if he saw any opportunity, to leave them to their own discourse. The prelate looked suspiciously and most negatively at him; but Peter of Oviedo and Ugo of Cordova, with more soldierly heartiness, approved the saying, and clamoured down contradiction by urging the increased difficulties in which they found their task involved.

Monsignor d'Enna was, nevertheless, astonished at the earliness of the summons he received from Lucrezia, and his suspicions had evidently deepened when he found Le Beaufort impatiently expecting his presence. He knew that Lucrezia could not expect the cardinal to be in readiness to hold council so early; and moreover it pleased her to receive the captain of Faenza in a small garden belonging to the palace, the raised terraces of which commanded a fair view of the rich plum-coloured valley of Lamone. Le Beaufort himself was somewhat agitated by the peculiar circumstances of the interview; and his emotion increased when he perceived the young duchess in all the bloom of her beauty, enlivened by the fresh morning air, and *felt* the smile with which she wel-

comed him from a distance. But his agitation could scarcely be concealed when, after a brief salutation, Lucrezia put her arm in his, and bowing with a gracious air of dismissal to Monsignor d'Enna, drew the young knight gently leaning on it towards a terrace remote from the whole group.

"Of my evil brother an evil instrument," she said, looking at the bishop, who continued to gaze after them with scowling scrutiny. "But I know that thou art none, my knight of the tournament of the Colosseum; and as well as words can say it, thine eye has told me that thou art Cæsar's captain because he had else been thy executioner!"

"In very truth, lady, I may more truly call myself the prisoner than the captain of Faenza," said Le Beaufort, glancing round with an alarm which visibly excited Lucrezia's fear, knowing that it must be well founded in so valiant a nature.

"Then can my lord repay in some measure the great debt he owes you—for I know all—all your unparalleled generosity!" said Lucrezia, tears glistening in her eyes. "They cannot deny me thine escort from this city, and once out of its walls—which, I know not wherefore, seemed to restrict the free beating of my heart as I entered them—it will be at thine own pleasure to return or accompany me to Ferrara, whose palace shall be your home, whose sovereign your brother, and whose mistress your most grateful, constant,—ay, and loving friend! Let Italy become your native land, and let Lucrezia d'Este inherit the champion of Lucrezia Borgia!"

"Lady!—and do you deem it possible? Possible that I, who grudge that any eye but mine should gaze upon your loveliness!—to behold you in his arms—to hear your children call him father! Oh, it is impossible, it is impossible to suffer this and live!" exclaimed Le Beaufort; but observing the alarm he had excited in Lucrezia, he added with a sad smile, "And, lady, after what has been, are even you assured that the prince would welcome such an escort?"

"Since he himself is to be of the company, what can he fear?" replied Lucrezia, with a vague and timorous smile, yet with great anxiety in her eyes. "And of this I was to speak; for since they tell me of the dangers from the Vitelli, I must confess to you, captain of Faenza,—that my lord would needs compel me—that, forsooth, he will not tarry my arrival in Ferrara, but this sunset should be with us here, in his ancient disguise of a Knight of St. John, to escort me thither, under I know not what pretext, to convince men that he has never been his own rival!"

The deep blush which at first dyed the cheek of the young bride faded into extreme paleness, when raising her eyes in astonishment at the prolonged silence of Sir Reginald, she perceived his aghast and terror-stricken look.

"And, therefore," she continued hastily, "I would beseech you to send forth your power—for I am pledged not to suffer a lance of mine own to leave me—to guard the ways, and bring him to Faenza in

safety; or if this may not be, at whatever risk or unexpectedness, I must hasten — something too eagerly as it may seem—to meet my lord."

"Now, indeed, is all lost, and I discern wherefore the traitorous duke chose this near city to Ferrara, believing that a bridegroom's impatience, and the lull of suspicion—all is lost!" said Le Beaufort wildly. "Hell has taught him all her subtleties, and now indeed are we entangled—all—in an inextricable snare!"

"Le Beaufort! speak—what is this ecstasy?" said Lucrezia, much agitated. "Nay, if I am to be frighted thus, I will leave your city instantly. Or dost thou deem that I—that *I*, Le Beaufort—that a woman—indeed, indeed, I strove to shun this rashness; and on my faith I have forewarned him he shall profit nothing by his frowardness!"

"I do believe thee, lady; but, alack, thou knowest not how," said Sir Reginald, his eye wandering despairingly over the lofty and well-guarded walls. "Is there no escape from this great trap? It seems but a leap to liberty; and yet are we barred in the slaughter-house, and wait but the butcher's axe!"

"I will depart ere I have broken my fast—I will not tarry with your terrors," said Lucrezia pettishly, but trembling all over. "Farewell!—since you take pleasure to affright me thus—and keep your prince's palace for himself."

"Lady, they will not suffer you to leave it thus to the devil's use," said Le Beaufort. "Hear me, and then if you will, essay to break the spell that clips you in, perchance to horrors of which fiends dare

scarcely dream—me and thy bridegroom to certain slaughter!"

"Speak out, or apprehension will kill me!" exclaimed the lady, sinking on the pedestal of a statue which was strangely overgrown with a flowering green weed.

"Even now Cæsar must be in Rome, with his potent army, master of all things, and daring all!" ejaculated Le Beaufort.

"Nay, for my sire's last words were a solemn promise to me never to allow Cæsar's bands to enter the city unless his own life or sovereignty was endangered," said Lucrezia, eagerly watching the effect of her words.

"And then both perchance were at extremity!" said Le Beaufort.

"Or fear you the influence of his creatures in the consistory?" she continued. "But that is over, and the balance is restored with friends to the peace of Italy, to Ferrara, and to me."

"All is in vain! A consistory of angels might scarcely save us now," said Le Beaufort; and with a rapidity which would have rendered him unintelligible to a less apt listener, he related Cæsar's revelation to him at Sinigaglia, and the project to execute which he had been sent to Faenza, without even hesitating in divulging the extraordinary part assigned to himself. The great force which environed them, and the nigh hopelessness of any extrication, needed scarcely his statement to be comprehended by Lucrezia.

Yet, after a long and aghast pause of incredulity,

wonder, and overwhelming conviction, the bright intelligence of Lucrezia seemed not to have deserted her.

"If this be their prodigious project, surely these heavens will not look calmly down to see it perfected!" she said, clasping her hands upward. "Madonna, help!—and perchance my thought even now is of her suggestion. Hast thou none whom thou canst trust in this matter of life and death to bear a message forth?"

"All of mine own riders; but a fly that bore a tinge of my livery were not suffered to leave the city," replied Le Beaufort.

"Softly, and we may yet invert this treachery on its planners," said Lucrezia. "Since they would have us renew our ancient friendship, tell them I am something reconciled to stay by thine eloquence—the rather that the Prince of Ferrara hath vexed me by a fearful retreat from his pledge to meet me in Faenza. And thereupon, as a jealous rival, or a lover that would secure his good, suggest to them a plan by which to entrap Alfonso still; for they will grieve to think so sweet a morsel of their treason should be snatched from them. Says, that to excuse my delay, thou hast won me to write, as in a womanly pettishness at a slight, to Alfonso, bidding him attend me privily in Faenza, or look not to see me hurriedly in Ferrara. And add that I will trust no messenger but one whose foreign tongue may keep him from babbling—one at your devotion; and he—oh, he may meet my lord in time to bring him, not alone, but with such force as a prince should ride withal,

which, with those within of my company, shall awe the traitors from their purpose."

Sir Reginald assented with great eagerness to a proposal which was the first glimpse of hope he had discerned in the universal darkness. Nor had he any time to offer objections, if he had felt any, for Monsignor d'Enna now appeared, approaching them with the Cardinal of Este.

"And 'tis fit to deceive the traitor's villanous interpretation—nay, it should not offend Alfonso himself—to see me circled in thy brotherly embrace!—here is my hand—do with it what thou wilt," said Lucrezia. And as Sir Reginald knelt, and with no acted passion covered it with kisses, she drew her hand away, stepped a few paces from him, then turned, and laughingly blew on it as if returning him his kisses, and placidly resumed his arm ere she affected to perceive the approach of the two prelates; and then Monsignor d'Enna might well mistake her glance at him for one of guilty fear and trouble.

CHAPTER XV.

"I thought mine enemies had been but man,
But spirits may be leagued with them—all Earth
Abandons—Heaven forgets me;—in the dearth
Of such defence the Powers of Evil can,
It may be, tempt me further, and prevail
Against the outworn creature they assail."

BYRON.

WHILE these events took place in Faenza the catastrophe of the too real drama was hastening on with equal rapidity in Rome.

We shift the scene to the Castle of Santangelo, an hour or two after sunset, in a gallery of which the castellain, Migueloto, was fretfully perambulating, examining doors and windows, and pausing at times to listen—when suddenly he felt a hand on his shoulder. Starting round, he discerned a figure attired in the coarse garb of some sutler or other follower of a camp, and his hand was on his dagger when the stranger raised the broad lappels of his hat, and disclosed the features of the Duke of Romagna.

"Hope has a light step, for I have walked in your footsteps these minutes, and yet you caught no

echo," he said. "Be not amazed to see me in Rome, for I am at Bracciano, asleep in my tent.—What are the news with ye?"

"The Datary, signor, has been seized with a sudden and most dangerous cholic," replied the castellain, gravely.

"And strange things his holiness has said thereupon, in the hearing of a friend of mine," replied Cæsar, gloomily. "I tell thee, man, we have no time to lose. She is at Faenza, and my plans succeed so well, that, by the treachery of the loving Knight of England, Alfonso of Ferrara must even now be in my power! But the rogue himself—and it is just — will not live to enjoy the fruit of his crime, wherewith vengeance travels abreast."

"In very truth 'tis wondrous how my lord finds a handle to all men," said Migueloto, in a somewhat remorseful and quivering tone. "Yet methinks it will avail me something that I have in a manner made a Christian of poor Miriam."

"Thou!" exclaimed Cæsar, with a laugh of utter incredulity.

"She is dying fast, for the air of dungeons is very withering when one is young, and her thoughts eat into her," said the tender-hearted castellain. "So, when we take the monk from his torture, and give him breath awhile, I have suffered her admission to his presence; and he hath discoursed her into blessed and calm moods, wherein she weeps so that it does one good to see her."

"Thou, too, hast dared to disobey me, then!" exclaimed Cæsar fiercely.

"Nay, my lord, since the order came we have not relaxed his punishment an instant," replied Migueloto.

"And she is dying, thou sayest? But it cannot be of dungeon air, since Fiamma lives," returned the Borgia.

"Ay, but Fiamma hath some great hope that comforts her, though in faith 'tis nothing heavenly, since she laughs when I bid her think of repentance," said Migueloto.

"Why, since thou believest still in this detected impostor, the mob will worship him," said Cæsar in a pleased tone. "Lead to his dungeon; I must speak with him."

The castellain immediately obeyed, and led the way to a subterraneous cell beneath the gardens of the castle, at so great a depth that all light was lost, and the air smelt foul and rank as if in a sepulchre.

Cæsar entered the friar's dungeon alone, for he took the lamp from Migueloto, and desired him to wait outside. Even with the aid of the light, which burned palely and sickly in the noisome air, it was some moments ere he could discern the object of which he came in search. But gradually he perceived the person of Fra Bruno, linked to the wall by a chain that scarcely permitted him to range beyond a heap of musty straw, which formed his bed, or rather lair. On this he was seated, gathered up in a singular couchant attitude, his eyes closed, and muttering aloud, interrupted only by the regular tric-troc of a drop of water which oozed through a hole in the wall, and fell perpetually with the same eternal

monotony of splash. It is said that the exceeding torture inflicted by this unvarying and regular sound often vanquished the obstinacy of criminals on whom the rack had exhausted its agonies in vain.

Listening for a few instants, Cæsar distinguished some words of that most dismal soliloquy—"Fiend, thou liest—for I believe! I do but pray for a sign, that I may believe without doubting. Tric-troc!—yes, for ever and for ever! Man cannot escape it—two thoughts equally balanced!—Tric-troc!—But how long? Oh, how blessed were it but one sound—tric-tric, or troc-troc, for ever! But tric-troc!—How long, how long!—only let it drop a little faster! I am not impatient, but my brain will burst! But no, no, no!—tric-troc, tric-troc! through all darkness, all eternity!"

"The sign is come—awake, arise!" said Cæsar, throwing the flare of his lamp suddenly on the Dominican, who leaped up with a loud rattle of his chain; but the radiance, feeble as it was, blinded him for the moment. "I see the light of thy presence, but not thy form," he exclaimed. "Art thou an angel, or but the mocking fiend who heaps upon my brain mountains of thought too heavy to be borne?"

"I am not an angel," replied Cæsar, calmly. "Albeit women hold me of a goodly personage. But methinks thou somethingrememberest of me?"

"Devil, avaunt! Hast thou taken that form, having failed in hers, to make me blaspheme?" exclaimed the prisoner frenziedly. "I spat in thy

face—I dashed thee from mine arms—albeit thou worest all her loveliness, and wooed me in her voice's most marvellous melody!"

"Devil I may be; but the devils, too, are constrained to work the good purposes of heaven," replied Cæsar, sedately. "I come to release thee from thy chains and thy tric-troc; to bid thee go forth and tell the people, who already hold thee for a miracle-worker, that thou hast a commission from on high to reform the church, to reduce it to the humility and holiness of apostolic times, and that one is appointed to be thy sword in the great work—whose name is Cæsar Borgia."

The monk looked vacantly at Cæsar as he uttered these words; but he scarcely seemed to comprehend his meaning, repeating them with a strange, wondering expression, as if in a vain endeavour to understand the thoughts conveyed. Cæsar patiently awaited the result, assiduously aiding the efforts of Fra Bruno's intellect by repetitions.

"Alexander's attention will soon be absorbed in matters of his own; the Colonna are astir in Rome, to take advantage of our Orsini warfare out of it," he continued. "But, if not, I swear that I will protect thee in thy labours. This castle shall be thy retreat—thy appearances out of it so many miracles."

"Thou, Cæsar Borgia, to aid in this work!" said Fra Bruno, vacantly.

"Thou shalt believe me, then! Monk or sorcerer, or both, dost thou hear?" exclaimed Cæsar, impatiently.

"I hear," replied Fra Bruno, but the question was not uncalled for, so statue-like was his countenance.

"Guelf and Ghibelline, tiger and wolf, couch not together—I tell thee there is about to be an emperor in Rome," said Cæsar. "And hast thou not, before heaven and earth, denounced the marriage of Lucrezia Borgia as a mortal sin against both?"

The effect of these words was so instantaneous, that there was something which might indeed be considered miraculous in it. The half-soddened intellect suddenly revivified; the wandering thoughts became fixed, and the Dominican exclaimed, with a look whose fierceness even startled the Borgia, "Who denies but damns himself!"

"Not I, for I have ventured on a most perilous deed to prevent it," said Cæsar. "Lucrezia is as yet but wedded by procuration, and even now she is my prisoner in Faenza."

"Thy prisoner—in Faenza!"

"Confessor! there is no need to tell thee that Cæsar Borgia would rather perish than suffer Lucrezia to become the wife of Alfonso of Ferrara—of one whom she loves so passionately, that for the first time her matchless beauty will truly be possessed!" said Cæsar, with a demoniac look. "And, monk, listen when I tell thee, that, albeit thou hast withstood all my torments, I know wherefore thou hatest me too much, because—thou hast loved her too well!"

Fra Bruno's head sank on his breast, and even its ghostly dungeon-tints became suffused; but after

a long pause, he replied only, "And she is thy prisoner in Faenza, on her way to Ferrara?"

"To her husband, to its prince! Dost thou know that Alfonso is the same whom she loved as the Knight of St. John?" continued Cæsar.

"Ever I knew it, ever I knew it, from the day we met at the torrent of Velino! But destiny is mightier than its wave; and she is thy prisoner, in Faenza?" replied the monk, hurriedly.

"And ere the certainty is known either to herself or to her sire, I must be master in Rome, or betake me for shelter—whither? Scarcely the grave can yield it," said Cæsar. "Therefore, I would have thee spread tidings of the event at hand abroad among the superstitious populace; and with thy tumults and those of the Colonna compel the pontiff to call my ensigns into Rome. Then am I master—then shalt thou reform the church to what poverty and lowliness thy barefoot fancies lead thee. Nay, I have such a miracle in store for thee as shall persuade the most incredulous that thy errand drops from above."

"What miracle? There are some more miraculous than those the vulgar call so," said Fra Bruno, after pausing for a moment in ecstatic rumination.

"I purpose, when my plan is ripened, to give a feast to the new cardinals,—but thou hast not heard—nine in number, all rich, and all mine enemies, whose inheritance my new estate will rejoice in and need," said Cæsar. "Thou shalt appear at it with gazers to report—accuse them of their simony, and in proof of their crime and thy mission invoke some sudden vengeance on their heads. And thereupon I tell

thee not one will leave that feast alive, but all droop their heads, and die like scalded poppies in the sun."

"Misfortune makes men doubt—how is this miracle to come to pass?" said Fra Bruno, after a short silence.

"Fie, thou wilt cheat none, if thou dost not first cheat thyself," replied Cæsar. "Canst thou doubt thou hast interest in heaven to make thy curses lightning?"

"Yea—for thou standest before me unblasted!" replied the Dominican. "Thou seest I dissemble not."

"Neither will I. The dames of the Ghetto, who also inhabit in this tomb, have assisted me to bottle some rare wines," said Cæsar, tranquilly folding his arms.

"But dost thou not fear that chance may for once be guided by some angel, and put the draught in thine own chalice?" replied Fra Bruno, with a dark glance upward.

"The butlers are my true servants, and the precious wines reserved for my friends are all distinguished by an infallible token," replied Cæsar, laughing, and yet with some anger at the bare supposition of so gross a miscarriage.

"But to call down a miracle, and none to follow, what manner of saint were I then?" said Fra Bruno, after another pause of profound rumination. "Cæsar, I understand thee; but art thou certain that the poison is deadly, tasteless, and too finely mingled to be discerned?"

"This assay 'tis my intent to make," replied

Cæsar, thoughtfully. "I am weary of these hags, whose direful practices, against which all the guards of Nero are disarmed, may return upon the user,—and I have promised them their liberty! Truly, if they who mingled the draught partake of it unwittingly, who can detect the impalpable essence in it?"

"And this were justice," said Fra Bruno, raptly. "And thou wilt set them free, not only from their dungeon of stone, but that of their withered and despised and age-aching carcasses?"

"Even so."

"Release me, then—tric-troc! I recognise the sign; I will fulfil the mission," exclaimed Fra Bruno, with a species of enthusiasm which excited the suspicion of the ever-wakeful Borgia.

"Yet, mark thou well, friar," he said, "and I pray thee believe me, when I tell thee that thy every step will be closely followed by one who knows how to use what he hath in his hand."

"Thou hast said I am a sorcerer, but it seems believest not thyself," replied Fra Bruno, with a fearful smile. "Be it even so; if I am sold to any devil, 'tis —to thee!"

CHAPTER XVI.

" Fain would I teach my soul forgetfulness;
And yet, I know not how, my legend shapes
Things that have been, in limnings of disguise."
Minstrel's Prologue.

It seemed that Monsignor d'Enna, with all his craft, was deceived by the device of Lucrezia, his belief in the jealousy and hatred which he supposed to animate the English knight, and his eagerness to secure so great an advantage to his master as the possession of Alfonso of Ferrara's person must be. Bampton was the messenger whom he permitted to depart from Faenza with the ensnaring epistle.

To sustain the illusion, Lucrezia was compelled to add to Le Beaufort's sufferings by the tenderness and familiarity in which she indulged him. It might be that something of regret and even, as Cæsar had predicted, of warmer feeling passed through her heart, at times contrasting the fervour and humility of Le Beaufort's passion with the calmness and mastery of that of her betrothed, which had rather subdued than won the love of a nature so fraught with the

volcanic fire of her clime, and showed itself far beyond her intent or suspicion. And then began the most violent and terrible of the many struggles which had torn the soul of Le Beaufort in the phases of his disastrous passion, when he felt and yet dared not confess to himself the slight but exquisite change in her demeanour, in which compassion and gratitude had melted into something he knew not what —and dared not conjecture, lest his worst agony should return.

The violence of his inward feelings could not always be concealed, and some slight shadows of suspicion and doubt perhaps crossed Lucrezia's mind. But night came and no Alfonso, who, if he had not received a warning, was to have arrived in Faenza; and her confidence returned in full tide, with an overflow of tenderness and gratitude, which, considering the cause, filled Le Beaufort with unutterable anguish and despair. Nay, there were moments when his generosity lost its heroic strain, and dark musings on the feasibility of Cæsar's plot sullied the chivalric brightness of his reveries. But the fiendish shadows found no abiding place in that loyal and devoted spirit, and he unweariedly pursued the dangerous and difficult task he had marked out for himself. He informed Monsignor d'Enna that his suit prospered even to his own wonder; which it certainly did to that of the prelate himself, since it began to cause him uneasiness lest the love-making instructions should be carried out farther than was dreamed by the grand conspirator. Le Beaufort even declared that he doubted not of ultimate success

if Lucrezia could be made to believe that she was slighted by her bridegroom, and therefore it was essentially necessary that his capture should be accomplished secretly, and not revealed until it might have become a source of congratulation to herself, and that meanwhile she should imagine her summons treated with neglect or contempt, or with a mistrust still more offensive to her proud heart. Under pretext of scouring the country to clear it of the Vitelli, strong parties of horse might be sent out on all the roads by which it was possible to approach Faenza, with instructions to secure the Knight of St. John, and bring him privately a prisoner into the city at nightfall, by a gate at which Sir Reginald would himself keep watch with his archers.

Monsignor d'Enna apparently fell completely into this snare, and the captain of Faenza beheld on the following day, with satisfaction, that the city was emptied of a considerable number of Cæsar's most ferocious and determined soldiery in scattered parties over the champaign towards Ferrara. But the delight with which Lucrezia now looked forward to the arrival of Alfonso, and counted the moments, even mingled with all her affection and gratitude to himself, inflicted sufferings so acute upon him that Lucrezia noticed a strange alteration in his manner, and the gloomy suspicions which had visited her returned in still darker colours. Doubts of his good faith crossed her mind, and a terrible apprehension seized her that she had herself devised the plan by which her lord was to be betrayed—for the letter was written for Monsignor d'Enna's perusal, and

was in truth an irresistible lure to a lover and a bridegroom, and the saving message was confided to the vassal of a rival! These suspicions deepened when, towards the hour at which it was possible that the Prince of Ferrara could arrive, Sir Reginald disappeared, and she learned only that he was on the ramparts, engaged in receiving his returning scouts, for as the part of the project he was now executing entailed the greatest personal risk upon himself, he had concealed it from her.

Aware, however, of the necessity of having Lucrezia's escort in readiness to second his plans, Sir Reginald determined to confide in Bembo, whose instrumentality would give little suspicion, and who might secretly inform Lucrezia's attendants of the expected arrival of the prince, who, although incognito, would anticipate the reception due to his high rank. To impress the importance of his communication on Bembo, he threw out hints of danger and of the necessity of secrecy, which the canon seemed to understand with great readiness and amplitude, if his tremulous assent and looks might be trusted.

Le Beaufort, however, had not long taken up his post of dreary expectation on the rampart over the Ferrara gate, with his English men-at-arms, ere he was startled by a most unexpected visit. The young duchess, accompanied by a retinue of her ladies and attendants and a guard, ascended the ramparts, and joined him on them as he stood leaning in a most melancholy mood over a battlement, watching the setting of the sun, at which it was possible and probable that Alfonso could arrive.

The captain of Faenza advanced to receive his illustrious visitant, and he was amazed at the change which a few short hours had made in Lucrezia, the singular expression of fierceness and anguish which had succeeded to the usual feminine sweetness and gaiety of her countenance.

"I have come to watch with you, captain, for time passes tediously in yonder dungeon, which its owners call a palace; and the free evening air may clear my fancy of some dismal thoughts that haunt it," she said, hurriedly. "Moreover, I would speak with you alone."

The attendants hearing these words, opened their ranks, and remained in conversation with one another, while the lady passed on with the wondering Le Beaufort, who was also somewhat vexed at the observation which this visit must draw to a part from which he wished it to be directed.

"Le Beaufort, I have trusted in thee — and despite the whisperings of a fiend I will trust in thee, until with mine own eyes I behold thy perfidy manifest!" she exclaimed, as soon as they were out of hearing, but with excessive wildness and agitation. "Monsignor d'Enna has been with me. He has warned me not to put any trust in thee; that thou hast organized a mutiny in thy garrison; won Cæsar's soldiers to serve thy treason; hast projected my seizure!—nay, that he fears thou hast devised some plan to prevent all communication with my friends, since he overheard thee giving commands to the various troops of thy scouts sent abroad to *slay a certain Knight of St. John* coming hither with

tidings from Ferrara; whose bleeding corpse presented at these gates is to be the signal for thy open treason, and my destruction!"

Sir Reginald looked at the lady for some moments in silent amazement, and then exclaimed with a start—"This, then, was their murderous hope and plan!"

"But hear me, Le Beaufort!—thou seest me here, but thou knowest not that I have ordered my whole array to attend at the gates below," continued Lucrezia. "If my foolish compassion and trust have given thee hope and means to execute thy barbarous enterprise, know that I await here for the arrival of Alfonso—living, to owe thee my existence in gratitude!—dead, to avenge him even with my own hand on thy remorseless treachery, for I will slay thee—yea, I—I that never harmed aught living—I will give thee to the axes of my soldiery without a tear or a pause!"

This last blow nigh vanquished Sir Reginald; he could not utter a single word in reply, but merely pointed to the setting sun, bowed his head on his breast, and remained absorbed in grief.

Lucrezia, it is probable, would have made some further effort to obtain a solution of her dreadful doubts, but Monsignor d'Enna himself now appeared upon the ramparts. Without affecting to notice the agitation of the interlocutors, he communicated an anxiety partly true and partly meant to increase suspicion, by observing to the captain of Faenza on the singular fact that none of the riders whom he had dispatched towards Ferrara had returned.

"They have heard perchance of some body of Vitelli, and are joining their lances to return in safety," said Le Beaufort, with a strong effort at calmness; and Monsignor d'Enna gave an emphatic glance at the duchess, who replied by a dreary gaze at her soldiery, now rapidly assembling below. This, then, Sir Reginald perceived, was the plot. Alfonso assassinated, and his death declared to be effected by his means; Lucrezia either to take his life, or share the ignominy of the imputed crime with him!

The impatience and terror of Lucrezia increased with every passing instant; and now the sun was below the horizon, and yet no sign of a single spear advancing to her deliverance! She answered Monsignor d'Enna's discourse evidently without knowing what she said, and her eyes frequently fell with a devouring expression of anxiety and terror on Sir Reginald. The anguish of the scene became almost insupportable to the latter; and even Monsignor d'Enna began to show signs of agitation, and to renew his inquiries concerning the scouts. At last, perceiving that Alfonso came not—maddened and desperate with the perfidy which surrounded him—Le Beaufort began to ruminate the most violent extremities. The assemblage of Lucrezia's escort gave him hopes that a sudden revelation of her danger, and the surprise, might put Faenza indeed into his hands, and thus secure her safety; and apprehensive only for her in the tumult which must ensue, he at length urged that the night was darkening in, and entreated the lady to retire. But the significance of his man-

ner and earnestness put the crown on her doubts and fears, and instead of complying, she started up, and exclaimed ravingly—"No, traitor!—I will await his slaughtered body here, and see thy head severed in expiation ere I depart!"

Even as she spoke Monsignor d'Enna suddenly exclaimed—"What banners are yonder? Surely we sent not our main strength thus abroad?"

"It is the banner of Alfonso of Este and his host!" said Le Beaufort, after a moment's intent gazing in the direction indicated. "And now, lady, let your headsman come! His stroke is kinder than your words!"

"Where is Don Ugo?—this is marvellous!" exclaimed Monsignor d'Enna, suddenly turning to retire, but Le Beaufort's hand was upon him.

"On thy life, stir not—or, consecrated frocksman as thou art, I will show that I am captain of Faenza, and will be obeyed by all within its walls," said Le Beaufort. "Stir not, or this axe is on thy treacherous and plotting skull, which for once simple honesty has foiled!"

"Le Beaufort! my hero! my knight! and wilt thou not forgive me?" exclaimed Lucrezia, her overwrought spirit yielding in a rush of tears.

"Open the gates, archers, to our friends—and wind the horns to bid them hasten!" was Le Beaufort's only reply; and the advancing squadrons were now so near that they heard and answered the blasts of the trumpets by setting spurs to their jaded steeds. Le Beaufort himself was among those who thrust

the gates open, to receive the riders—foremost of whom was a Knight Hospitaller of St. John.

The captain of Faenza was, however, not among those who hurried to witness the meeting between the illustrious lovers; nor, indeed, until the whole group of ladies had returned to the palace, and the prince himself sought him out, attended by his chief officers and knights, did the dignitary present himself to notice. But this coldness nigh vanished in the close and long embrace with which the Prince of Ferrara greeted his ancient friend, and no trace of it appeared in the immediate assent of the captain to his request, that, to avoid incommoding the unexpected visitors, his own troops should seek their lodging for the night in the neighbouring villages. Something there might be of shrinking and unwillingness in the manner in which, after making the necessary arrangements, Le Beaufort followed the prince to the presence of his beautiful bride; but it melted away in a strange and violent flood of emotion, when Lucrezia rushed to meet them, weeping with unutterable joy and gratitude, and snatching both his hands implored his pardon with passionate fervour for her unjust suspicions. Then observing the pallor which almost instantly succeeded the flush on Sir Reginald's face, when Alfonso smilingly declared that his jealousy was roused, she said, "Oh, pardon me, that I may sleep to-night, for though both my warriors shall watch together to keep my rest secure, my conscience will else leave me none!"

And yet but little of that night was devoted to

sleep, so many and various and infinitely interesting to each other were the events to be detailed and discussed, although no farther apprehension was entertained of Cæsar's Faventine conspiracy. The Ferrarese force was already more than equal to that of the garrison of Faenza, and a still more considerable body might be expected at dawn; and as soon after its arrival as possible the prince and his bride were to depart for Ferrara. Thither both warmly pressed Sir Reginald to accompany them; but he refused with a kind of acrimony—and it was strange that Lucrezia blushed, and turned away from the gaze of her lover-husband with a sigh. And it was then that Sir Reginald announced his determination to return secretly to Rome, and endeavour to save the Orsini by declaring Cæsar's conspiracy to the pontiff, which their submission and alliance would enable him to withstand.

The necessity of putting the pontiff on his guard had overcome Lucrezia's aversion to afflict him with the revelations of Cæsar's perfidy and treason. Moreover, it was probable that the failure of a part of his plan, which required him to precipitate the rest, might incline him to more rational counsels. But the peril to which Sir Reginald must expose himself made her passionate in her entreaties that he would allow her to select some other messenger, without moving him from his resolution; until the warmth and eagerness of her appeal brought a cloud even to Alfonso's brow. Le Beaufort urged that none other would have the necessary zeal with which the wrong he had done the Orsino inspired him, nor had the

same irrefragable proofs to offer of Cæsar's guilt. Whatever suspicion his conduct might occasion, the emissaries of Cæsar could not be assured of his complicity in the rescue; and his daring to return to Rome was an argument of his innocence. But Lucrezia would not be satisfied, until at length, himself observing Alfonso's gloom, he promised to accompany them towards Ferrara, as if intending to go thither, and then to take the road back to Rome in some disguise which would conceal him from Cæsar's vengeance.

Day broke upon this conference, and Alfonso earnestly entreated his rescued bride to retire and take some repose; and again the colour deserted Sir Reginald's cheeks, and flamed beautifully over Lucrezia's.

"'Tis true that I must learn to obey, but yet I will condition with you, signor, for that I am yet trembling with my fears, that you will promise me to watch to-night with your brother-in-arms," she said, in her sweetest and most irresistible tones. "And so, my lord, until we meet again in this chamber, which I make my guard-room, good morrow; and you, Sir Reginald, you—good night!"

Le Beaufort now felt that his main difficulty was to win Bampton's consent to his purpose, who had cheerfully staked his life, and executed his master's will with such prudence and success, in the hope that his Italian adventures would certainly conclude in the rescue of Lucrezia. Unbounded, therefore, was the disappointment of the old man when he learned Sir Reginald's intention of returning to

Rome, by the instructions which he gave him to lead his archers on to Ferrara, whither he expected shortly to follow, and proceeding thence, to take shipping at Venice.

"Ever the thought hath been with me that I should never see Redwood again, nor my daughter, and the white-haired boy, her son," the ancient vassal said, tears streaming unrestrainedly from his eyes. "For, to deem that I will ever leave you, Master Reginald, while there is strength left in my old limbs to crawl after you, is even to call me a false and disloyal knave. Wherefore I will not, but will follow you even to the death, to which I know you wend—St. Botolph be merciful, and some plague light on the bright, deceiving women of this land!"

Le Beaufort was well acquainted with the obstinacy of his old squire, but he essayed to turn him from his resolution by all arguments—even the additional danger to which he exposed himself of a discovery—but in vain; and he was obliged to yield.

Sunrise brought a considerable increase to the great military retinue which was in readiness to attend the Prince of Ferrara and his bride to their capital. But the reinforcement was scarcely needed, for Le Beaufort had retaliated their lessons on Cæsar's deputies, and suffered no one to leave Faenza under any pretext, so that it was impossible to assemble any force capable of resisting that of Alfonso. And before the neighbouring garrisons of Cæsar could learn the news, the bridal array poured out of Faenza, escorted by the captain himself and his English, in

great magnificence, and accompanied by the tumultuous acclamations and joyful wishes of the unconscious Faventines.

At Ravenna all danger ceased, for there began the well-watched frontiers of the states of Venice—fast friends of the house of Este, and exasperated enemies of the Borgias. It was about the termination of the vast pine forest, which extended even to the frontiers of Ferrara, that Lucrezia, who was so absorbed in conversation with her lord that even her compassionate tenderness had for awhile not noticed Le Beaufort's absence, was somewhat startled to perceive a cavalier, arrayed in the dark weeds of the Knights of St. John, which Alfonso's wear had familiarised in her sight, who rode towards her with his visor down, and attended by a single, greybearded man-at-arms, as darkly liveried.

Dismounting, raising the bars of his helmet, and kneeling at her stirrup, it was Sir Reginald le Beaufort who asked in a faltering tone her latest commands for Rome.

"With humblest reverence and love to his holiness, these," she replied in a troubled voice, and drawing a paper from her bosom. "Herein I have commended you to his implicit credence, and your safety so specially to his care that I request it of his grace by this ring, which when my father gave me he promised should never accompany any petition of mine in vain. Take it, good and valiant and loyal knight! and be those robes as fortunate to thee as my lord would have me think—they have been to him!"

"Then, lady, they must be mine for ever!" replied Le Beaufort, in a voice which he in vain endeavoured to make clear and steady.

"Not so, not so, O, *mon Le Beaufort!*" she said, bending over him to hide her emotion, but tears fell sparkling and fast from her eyes. "Not so!—But rather thou shalt promise me to bring thy sweet English bride—the maiden of thy troth—to see her husband's friends in Italy—wherein we shall not be forgotten that dwell in Ferrara! Gratitude cannot pay thee—therefore I will speak of none.—But yet," she added, with her most bewitchingly sweet and tender smile, "my lord will pardon me when—remembering that thy first kiss was but rudely welcomed—let this—*our* last!—take the bee's sting out with his honey."

And bending suddenly from her steed she pressed her lips gently and very tenderly to the brow of Sir Reginald—but, retreat as rapidly as she might, not until his own had returned the precious boon were they withdrawn!

"Pardon me, lady," were his latest words to Lucrezia d'Este; "all time cannot efface this moment; and for its duration, I will take no other farewell!"

And in truth, in whatever distant scenes and times, when was that moment altogether forgotten by Reginald le Beaufort? and how oft would the gleam of the sun through glades far remote bring back the pinewood forest, the rustle of the gloomy branches, the snow-white steed, and the bending lady and the

warlike halt around, and the smile mingled with its tears, and the gentle pressure of those sweetest lips! —until it seemed as if indeed existence was but one long, lingering echo of his own latest word—Farewell!

CHAPTER XVII.

" If that the Heavens do not their visible spirits
Send quickly down to tame these vile offences,
'Twill come.
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
Like monsters of the deep."

King Lear.

Le Beaufort's sole hope and object was now in his project of preserving the Orsini, and avenging himself on Cæsar by the exposure of his villany and the ruin of his mighty projects of ambition. He had taken care that no messenger left Faenza up to the moment of his departure, and he confided that Cæsar's emissaries would exhaust every effort at retrieval ere they dared to send the intelligence of their failure to him, and that the messenger of ill news would make no peculiar speed. Yet he hurried on his perilous mission with restless activity, following the line of Cæsar's destructive march; and the rapidity of his journey was proved by the fact that on the second day of his travel, descending to cross the Tiber at the ferry opposite Orte, in a forest which filled the valley on each side, a black pedestrian overtook the knight and his squire, glanced at them,

and hastened past with inconceivable rapidity. Sir Reginald, in his deep and now habitual reverie, scarcely noticed the phantom, which he perhaps thought was some Moorish slave making his escape; but Bampton instantly whirled his cross-bow round from his shoulder, carefully set the bolt—and in the twinkling of an eye even the rapid messenger was overtaken, and fell to the ground with a stroke so mortal, that he uttered but one wild-beast yell and expired.

Le Beaufort's wonder at this extraordinary act of violence on the part of his squire only subsided when he recognised in the slain Cæsar's swift African runner, Zeid. He then readily lent his assistance to Bampton to draw the carcass into the wood, there to be devoured by its kindred wolves, and aided him to search for any missives of which the runner might be bearer. They found only a few lines, but those were valuable, as testimony from Monsignor d'Enna, distractedly informing the duke that his whole project at Faenza was ruined by the treason of the English knight; that Alfonso and his bride were safely arrived in Ferrara; and that to provide for the worst, himself and his other servants in Romagna would assemble all possible force, and march to join him in Rome.

Continuing his journey with unabated diligence, Le Beaufort entered the ravaged patrimony of St. Peter, but near Bracciano he overtook a company of travellers, the object of whose journey seemed of a kind to supersede his own.

Le Beaufort had purposely delayed his passage

through the country of Bracciano until nightfall, to avoid meeting with the scouring parties of the besiegers; but on an eminence which commanded a view of the lake of Bracciano, and the vast black masses of the Orsini castle, surrounded by innumerable watch-fires, he fell in with a dreary company. Some half-dozen men-at-arms, with torches in their hands, bearing the Orsini badge, and seemingly under guard or care of a larger party of Migueloto's most select ruffians, among whom was the noted bandit and assassin, John of the Catacombs, escorted a lofty car, canopied and hung with black velvet, richly emblazoned with heraldic devices, strangely conspicuous among which were ropes twisted in a great variety of nooses. Upon the car was a bier, covered with flame-coloured velvet, under which were horribly distinct the forms of two human beings, evidently, from their motionless attitude, dead.

So strange a spectacle necessarily attracted Le Beaufort's curiosity, and he accosted the leader of the party with a fearlessness which disarmed any suspicion he might otherwise have entertained, especially as he used a pass-word which he had acquired at Faenza—Cæsar Imperator; and in reply he learned that upon the hearse lay the corpses of Paolo Orsino and his father, the Duke of Gravina, who had been strangled by the Duke of Romagna's command, in the castle of La Pieve. With the purpose of terrifying young Fabio and his adherents into surrender and submission, by the spectacle of the punishment his relatives' treason had obtained, and to show to all the world the impartial and inflexible

nature of his highness's justice, these corpses were thus solemnly and publicly escorted to Bracciano for interment, with visible signs of their painful and ignominious doom.

Sir Reginald could scarcely believe this tale, although the bravo assured him that he had done "the justice" with his own hands, until he raised the covering, and threw the blaze of a torch on the ghastly and horrible visages of the two Orsini, lying side by side in their daily garb, whose monstrous eyes, nearly forced from their sockets, and swollen flesh, direfully witnessed the horrible manner of their death. Paolo's teeth were firmly set in his tongue, and his dead eyes had a glare in the torchlight which seemed as if they rekindled for an instant in the horror-struck gaze of his friend. And no language, no eloquence, could equal the energy of that appeal for vengeance which the silent and mutilated carcass conveyed! But when Sir Reginald considered all the horrors of the fate his friend had undergone, for ever ignorant of his purposes of aid and revenge, perhaps deeming him a villain of the darkest dye, overwhelmed by every species of anguish, disappointed in his love, betrayed, crushed with the consciousness that he had caused the destruction of his father and of his friends—the vile and degrading manner of his death to a noble and a knight—the boldest assassin of all the group would have been affrighted to hear the oath of vengeance which, in his secret soul, Le Beaufort took.

Crossing himself in ratification of the vow, but as if merely in natural horror at the spectacle, Le Beau-

fort turned away, and, after a moment's thought, desired John of the Catacombs to inform the duke that he had encountered a messenger from Faenza, in the arms *once worn by a Knight of St. John,* who sent his highness word that all went well there, and that only his presence in Rome was needful, where he would await him with the news, since he might not, for special reasons, attend him at his siege of Bracciano.

Le Beaufort arrived in Rome at too early an hour to present himself to the pontiff; and all the intelligence he learned in the meantime increased his wrath and apprehensions. The destruction of the whole race of the Orsini seemed determined: Cardinal Orsino had died suddenly in Santangelo; and although his body was publicly exhibited by command of the pope, the belief that his death was caused by poison had infuriated the adherents of the unfortunate family into open riots. The Colonnas were astir in the southern Campagna of Rome, secretly aided by the Spaniards; and still more portentous was the re-appearance of the famous friar, Bruno Lanfranchi. He was reported to have a miraculous power of quitting the dungeons in which the Borgias had confined him, at his pleasure; which strange belief, aided by the mad fervour of his eloquence, and great sufferings, gathered around him the masses of the populace, to whom he preached some divine mission of his own, and declaimed and uttered fearful prophecies against the person and government of Alexander, with a violence which demonstrated a strange indifference or alarm in the pontiff, since he made no effort to repress

the tumultuary assemblages which listened to these denunciations. Yet it was true that, at the moment, it was not expedient to hazard any commotion among the fierce and fanatic populace of Rome. The pontiff's own troops were principally absent in the Campagna, repressing the attempts of the Colonna; the siege of Bracciano and the defence of his new possessions absorbed Cæsar's force; and even the brigands of Rome, by their lawless outbreaks, demonstrated the weakness of the sway which should have restrained them.

At the earliest suitable hour Le Beaufort arrived at the Vatican; and immediately on announcing that he brought a message from the Duchess of Ferrara he was admitted into the presence of Alexander. Le Beaufort was not altogether surprised to find the pontiff with his hands clasped on his breast, and seemingly absorbed in profound and gloomy thought. But the entry of the messenger from his daughter somewhat brightened his expression.

"What are the news? How fares it with our young duchess? Wert thou present at her entry? What did the people say when they beheld the beauty of their prince's bride?" said Alexander, impetuously. "Alack! they have gained all that we have lost, and the light seems departed out of Rome. What said she? what remembrance sent she to our love?"

"Holy father, my news are for your private ear only," said Sir Reginald; and the voice apparently struck the pontiff.

"Thou speakest from a sepulchre.—What ails thee, to keep the bars of thine helmet down?" he said.

"Or dost thou think we are to trust our person with a stranger?"

"I have here a letter to warrant so much," replied Le Beaufort, kneeling and presenting Lucrezia's letter.

"We have not forgotten the poisoned package of Tomaso Tomasi; but yet it is our sweet one's hand, which nothing evil can imitate," said Alexander, taking the epistle, on reading which he turned ashy pale, and hurriedly waved to his attendants to retire.

"And so thou art Cæsar's mad jest—the noble English paladin that hath done us so much harm?" said the pontiff, hurriedly. "Speak boldly; we esteem thy valour though we have suffered by it; and this letter bids us trust thee, whatever marvels thou mayest deliver, whatever terrific tidings against the Duke of Romagna! But, first, where didst thou leave our niece? safe in her princely husband's arms?"

"Safe, holy father," replied the deeply melancholy tones of Le Beaufort. "Safe, beyond Ravenna—safe, out of Faenza."

"Safe, out of Faenza—her brother's mightiest fortress! Dost thou, too, dare to echo in mine ears the lies for which the poets of Naples are damned?" said Alexander angrily.

"Your holiness may judge when you shall hear by what means—to execute what purpose of the Duke of Romagna, he made me his captain of Faenza!" replied Le Beaufort; and with a calmness scarcely to be expected from him he related the con-

ference at Sinigaglia, merely so far at first as related to the seizure of Lucrezia at Faenza.

Frequent exclamations of incredulity, anger, and amazement from Alexander interrupted the knight, but the former feelings gained the mastery.

"What frenzied falsehood is this?" he exclaimed. "It is of thine invention, to gratify thy hatred of the duke, and avenge the traitors, thy friends!—and yet 'tis Lucrezia's handwriting here! I see how it is—what ails ye all—ye envy him this greatness which he hath achieved so toilsomely—so valiantly. The rebellious brood of the Orsini are nigh extinct, and we are made the arbiters of Italy—and ye come with this false tale! Lucrezia's heart is no longer Borgian—but of Este! She loves her sire no longer, or she would not tear my heart thus with these perjuries! Begone from my presence, slanderer—or rather thou shalt to Santangelo, to abide my son's just vengeance on thy calumnies."

"This sign perchance may protect me; if not, let him prove me false, his body against mine, and I am content," replied the English knight.

"It is indeed her ring," said the pontiff, relapsing from his angry tone. "It is her ring—which lightly she would not have parted withal. But how—if thy legend hath but the shadow of truth in it—how is Lucrezia in Ferrara, and how art thou here?"

"They meant me to be the assassin of her noble husband, thence to murder her name, and give a pretext for mine own destruction when the time was ripe; and therefore I boast no merit in the share I

had in foiling the plot, signor," replied Le Beaufort; and with unruffled firmness he continued his story, and it seemed as if some direful spell compelled the pontiff to listen in utter and aghast silence.

"It is not true; it cannot be true; it shall not be true!" he exclaimed at length, clenching his hands and looking upward, as if imploring of the heavens to overthrow even the laws of moral evidence on his behalf, in the excess of his anguish.

"Read then these intercepted tidings from Cæsar's emissary—death aided me to win this testimony!" said Sir Reginald, producing Monsignor d'Enna's scroll, still splashed with the blood of Zeid.

"What if it all be true! It is thy gloss that lies!" said the pontiff with sudden fury, after a long despairing examination of this irresistible proof. "The Duke of Romagna is jealous of our favour—not of his sister's love—and devised an expedient to stop her on her way, for which thou at least shouldst not have been ungrateful!"

"Your holiness notes the conclusion of this scroll, which promises the duke's forces from Romagna to march on Rome?" continued the inexorable avenger. "Wherefore they come you have yet to learn!"

"In truth the Duchess of Ferrara speaks of some treason plotted against us—a revelation from thee—ay, offers me, forsooth, her lord's aid against her brother! She queens it something too fast," said Alexander, in a broken and confused tone. "The Holy See, in our person, is not yet at that pass to need the good favour of a Lombard duke."

Totally unshaken by the anguish he inflicted, Le

Beaufort resumed his narrative by reciting the corollary of the plot of Faenza, which Cæsar was undoubtedly urging to fulfilment in Rome, and which included, probably, the dethronement of the pontiff—certainly his deprivation of all real power.

"I am ill, good knight!—air! give me air, or my heart—air!" interrupted Alexander, rising and staggering dizzily a few paces; but ere Sir Reginald could offer his support he had resumed his firmness, and turned with fierceness on the messenger. "It is false! it must be false! For if Cæsar plotted this treason against ourself, wherefore should he deprive himself of the support so great an alliance yields?"

"For the same reason that he murdered his brother, Francesco!" replied Le Beaufort; and his eyes met Alexander's half-frenzied glare with a meaning in them which in a manner paralyzed him.

"Francesco!—murdered!" repeated the pontiff, and a dark sweat burst forth on his visage, and he leaned for a moment the whole weight of his massive person on the knight.

"This is nothing—only that we grow old," he said, rallying with a mighty effort. "My sight vanished for an instant—very naturally, very naturally—Where didst thou leave my child? where is my Lucrezia?—Alas! I am dying, and she will think her tidings killed me;—say 'twas not so, on your life, good knight!—But yet this at least—Francesco!—by his hand!—this is not true; 'tis false!"

"Remembers not your paternity the mad Jewess of the Ghetto?" replied Le Beaufort.

"This indeed were a meet punishment for me—a doom more hideous than to toss for ever in the eternal flames!" groaned Alexander. "But that this fear at least is all unfounded, thyself shalt learn." And touching a silver bell fastened to his footstool, he commanded an attendant who appeared to re-admit the Dominican friar in the antechamber.

"Retire into the shadow of yonder canopy—and thou wilt not be observed, for he who comes is dull of apprehension, and will not note your presence," said Alexander, with feverish eagerness and wildness.

Le Beaufort obeyed, and almost instantly the burly form of Fra Biccocco was kneeling at the pontiff's feet.

"Be not afraid!—so great a service performed, as well as promised, may well cancel the wild ravings of one who hath received some harshness at our hands, and but lately escaped from our dungeons," said Alexander. "Thy master, true to his obligation, will not reveal what hath been confided to him in confession; but yet will reveal to us the murderer of the Duke of Gandia, by a means of his own?"

"If the Jewish convertite be permitted to attend at the great junket to-night, where the murderer will be, most venerable holy lord and father," replied Fra Biccocco, notwithstanding his heretic training quaking with awe.

"The feast in the vineyard of Adrian di Corneto, on the Vatican!—But he knows not that the Duke

of Romagna will be there, from his siege?" said Alexander, very eagerly.

"Brother Bruno bade me implore your amplitude to send for him to share in the joy of the discovery —which after what folks say—but I am dumb except on what I was sent to say."

"It is very well.—Go then and reply that if Fra Bruno fulfils his word—his cowl is changed to a scarlet hat," said Alexander.

"Fra Bruno, then, most celsitude, desires that your grandeur will be pleased to send him a summons to your presence, when he is baptizing the Jewess before all the people, in the square of St. Peter, this sunset; and to send with it a force sufficient to excuse his obedience to the populace, and commanded by one in whom you can trust against all opposers—for the murderer is a man of might."

The pontiff nodded implicit approval and assent.

"And further—dreading the power of those he shall deliver to your vengeance, and in due regard to his own safety, my brother, holy Bruno, the second of that beatified glorification—bade me crave, as an assurance of your protection, the golden box which your paternity wears ever in your bosom."

"The most blessed Host!—which as long as I wore an astronomer foretold to me, I should not die!" replied Alexander. "But here it is—bid him keep it till he demands his own ransom of me."

Fra Biccocco took the chain and little box with great reverence, kissing it devoutly; and the gesture

of the pontiff dismissed him, for he retired with many reverences.

"Thou hast heard!" he exclaimed triumphantly, as Le Beaufort re-appeared.

"And this proffer comes from Friar Bruno?" said Le Beaufort, also joyfully, though at first he but confusedly remembered the strange stories concerning him which Don Alfonso had related.

"Even so," replied the pontiff, pleased mistakenly with this satisfaction. "And thereupon hear what resolution I have formed. Cæsar himself gives a feast of reconciliation with the new-made cardinals at eventide, albeit few of them are held to be his friends —in the vineyard of Cardinal Adrian, on the Vatican. To disprove which evil thought, and win him from his headstrong jealousies of his sister's fortune —for indeed it is no more—they shall concur with me to-day to make his ducal crown royal! King of Romagna we will make him, since heaven hath lodged in our hands the power to make and unmake all the sovereignties of earth, much more those of our own land and dominion. Fear nothing for thy safety, which we will care for as dearly as our own— and we mean this feast shall be one of universal reconciliation. Thou shalt aid in the good work, for thou shalt be the messenger we will send for the friar and his Jewish convert; and thou shalt witness all things, and return with brighter tidings to our child, and news that we are on our way to see her on her throne in Ferrara—bringing with us matters to make an old man welcome."

Le Beaufort bent in submission, and but that he

remembered the visages of the Orsini, he could have shared in the agony of grief and tenderness which overcame the strong heart of Alexander — when turning away he covered his face in a passion of silent grief!

CHAPTER XVIII.

" The cloud-capt towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve ;
And like this unsubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a wreck behind !"

SHAKSPERE.

NEARLY at the hour when Le Beaufort met the funeral car of the Orsini, the figure of the Black Penitent glided out of a dungeon in which from time to time deep groans were audible, and passing a number of sentinels, finally vanished down the unfrequented gallery leading to the tomb of Adrian, in which Fiamma had held her incantation. No inquiry or challenge was addressed to the Black Penitent, according to the commands of the castellain, which authorized his entry or egress at pleasure; and the general fear entertained of a being who was looked upon as some fiendish familiar of Cæsar, or at best as a professor of the black art in his service, prevented any idle curiosity.

Descending into the vault we have formerly de-

scribed, by the spiral pillar, Dom Sabbat immediately lighted a torch, and took a deliberate survey of the chamber. The first object on which his light gleamed was the figure of a woman, chained by a ring to the wall, and couched on a bed of straw, so white and motionless, that but for the apathetic stare which she fixed on the intruder it might have been thought that a marble statue lay there.

"Tric-troc!—Fiamma! the hour of vengeance is at hand," said Dom Sabbat. "Notte is perishing, and the thick agonies would but let her tell me that thou hast seen where the poisoned wines are concealed. Speak, where is it?"

Without replying by a single word the prisoner raised her thin white hand and pointed to one of the archways, which the sage immediately entered, and made his way to a circular excavation which seemed used as a wine-cellar, for snow was piled around, in a heap of which lay glistering a number of bottles of scarlet crystal, finely cut, and sealed with a rich silver ornament. Others of exactly similar make and colour, with the difference that they were sealed with lead, and fewer in number, lay at some distance from this heap. Approaching the former, Dom Sabbat took an instrument from his pouch which seemed contrived for the purpose, and deliberately wrenched out all the corks, without in the least injuring their fine seals. Muttering "tric-troc" in a strange manner many times to himself, the sage then drew an exactly similar number of the leaden corks, transferring one of the more precious ornament to each as he proceeded; and when he had completed the whole

number, he carefully replaced all in the exact forms in which they had lain in the snow, and retired.

"Fiamma!" he said, as he returned, and again the figure raised itself mechanically and listened. "I did hear Morta tell thy unkindly slow murderer that thou alone of all her disciples knowest the antidote to this poison, the subtle cantarelle;—thou wilt not betray it?"

Fiamma laughed, though soundlessly, and covered her eyes with her hand as if the light troubled them; and with a profound sigh, and extinguishing his torch, the magus left the dungeon, murmuring "Thou shouldst at least have had sense spared thee to know thyself avenged—to have witnessed thy murderer's agony and doom!"

Winding to the summit of the stairs, it seemed to the sage when he reached it that something like a shriek sounded from below; but he dared not pause to satisfy himself, and continued his retreat.

The noon of that memorable day arrived, and the cannon of Santangelo announced a visit from the general of the church, whose vigilance made him pay his first visit to the fortress.

The castellain was of course in immediate attendance on his lord, who listened to his reports with profound attention and interest, and whose countenance betrayed, against its wont, much inward anxiety and troubled working of the mind.

"Fool!—I pray your pardon, and doff my cap to ask it, Migueloto; but it stirs me to hear thee call this man saint, when thou seest that he can work no miracles without thy connivance," he said, at length

interrupting the castellain. "We have no time for these long pratings, for every instant that sweeps past heralds destiny! But the friar no longer doubts the efficacy of our miracle draught, since he was with the hags in their agony?"

"They linger still—yet but that they are both of meagre and sparing diet, and of so suspicious a turn, they had not outlived the half hour they give to those who drink of it, in pains so sharp," said Migueloto. "I told them their breakfast was from mine own table, pleasantly adding that they should not eat another in Santangelo. And yet Morta smacked her lips at the first taste, and looked snakily at me. And now to hear how they rave and blaspheme! how they promise me all their accumulated treasures in the Ghetto (which shall be mine at a cheaper rate) if I will yield them the materials for an antidote. But more than their own doom, methinks, it troubles them to hear of their grandchild's conversion and salvation."

"I should rejoice in this—for this is justice, and to serve our own turns by fair means should surely be pleasing, even but for the newness," said Cæsar. "And yet—I know not why—why should my spirit droop thus, that was ever so clear and mounting on an enterprise?—and this is the greatest of my life, the end, the completion, the crown of all;—and all goes well! The Orsini are terror-struck, and busied in burying their dead; and though Fabio be obstinate, his fiercest adherents treat secretly of a surrender, which I will only not accept because I will not leave Bracciano but for Rome! And when this

tumult surges up, how can the old sire deny it, albeit he hath promised his dearest chuckling as much, who means still to govern us all from Ferrara! Best news are from Faenza—for Lucrezia falls into the snare, and my last messenger brings me tidings of a plot into which both my enemies must fall—the beloved Alfonso himself—the beloving English thickskull—nay, has fallen, or what meant that message which honest John brought me, summoning me to Rome, from one whom he met at Bracciano? A dark stranger, and beside the carcasses of the Orsini! Doubtless he will be here anon, since the ordnance has roared my arrival to the city so deafeningly."

"But that is strange, my lord. Why went he not with his news to Bracciano?" said Migueloto.

"That I shall learn, too; but I doubt not he is sent by Monsignor d'Enna to give the colouring I desired to Lucrezia's delay in Faenza, or to relate the catastrophe; and to have called at Bracciano would not render his tidings more authentic," replied the duke. "Yet it is something strange—so peremptory a summons, and to me! I must have a good apology for boldness and irreverence like this. And unless he wore the weeds of a black knight to betoken that Alfonso needed his disguises no longer, wherefore in array so ominous?"

"And yet, my lord, were it not too late—omens are not to be despised! I had a fearful dream last night," said Don Migueloto; and observing that Cæsar looked at him with some attention, he continued—"Methought I was at high mass in the old

church of our township, near Murviedro, and went to kneel among some children, who were cracking nuts instead of listening to their prayers, intending to reprove them. But they looked at me with such a smiling scorn and loathing that my tongue became too dry for utterance. And while I was striving to cry at least Jesu peccavi! I heard a strange stir, and saw the people pressing to the doors, as if to see some strange matter without—and for the most part they were men whom I have known, such as John of the Catacombs and mine own soldiery. But suddenly the doors of the church flew open of their own accord, and in rushed a mighty giant, raging mad, with a club in his hand as broad as a man's girth; and I knew it was his holiness the pope, and he dashed out brains on every side as if men's skulls were eggshells, yelling 'My son, my son! where are the murderers of my son?' And then I remembered the duke—your brother, and hid myself in very agony under the huge tomb of the Aguilars, lords of our village; and then methought the stones rolled away that prop it, and the whole crushing weight was upon my breast; and in the struggle of my doom I awoke!"

"If dreams could fright me, castellain, thy dull fancy shapes none so terrible as those that visit my couch," replied Cæsar, not altogether undisturbed. "The oracle is only—that if thou stumblest on an ill end thou canst not say it chanced without a warning. But I tell thee 'tis too late, though the fiend rose beneath our feet to warn us back!—Where is the monk?"

"I hear him even now, signor, with his tric-troc. His lonely imprisonment has something touched his wits—but for the most part it happens so; and even Fiamma hath now a strange way of looking at one, and asks how time goes by the obelisk in the market-place, which is older than Rome itself, they say," replied the castellain.

"Tric-troc! tric-troc!—how strangely the world whirls round, and takes no rest," said Fra Bruno, muttering to himself as he entered the chamber; but changing his perturbed and wild expression into one of self-possession and calm as he recognised Cæsar. "Signor, the Jewesses are in a fearful agony—passing away all unrepented and unabsolved."

"Let them perish!—it is even justice!" said Cæsar.

"The Duke of Romagna says so, and it is an oracle," said Fra Bruno, with a momentary expression in his eyes which struck the suspicious Borgia.

"Call it vengeance, and not justice, if thou wilt; and look, not to incur the like: thy fellow-sorceress still lives to tell men what thou art, if thou angerest me," he said. "But no, I trust in thee—and thou shalt be our only miracle-worker. Despite Migueloto's proclamation, and bolts, and bars, and Jewish prayers, most supernaturally shalt thou keep thy word with the populace, and appear in the square of St. Peter with thy convertite! Thy citation shall drag the bride of Ferrara from her blood-stained pastimes in Faenza, to answer it! Thou shalt appear before the pontiff to refute those Jews that will have it Miriam is mad;—and thou shalt refute

them with miracles, when thy denunciation brings down destruction, sudden as lightning, on the princes of the church—the simonists named in this schedule. And if, meanwhile, the surrender of Miriam to the Jews, by overruling commands, stirs the whole Christian populace in uproar—if the brigands increase it by lawless doings to affright all honest men —if Colonna and Orsini burst into open rebellion, and the mob recognise thy miraculous errand—certes, Alexander can find no other refuge than my fortress —no rescue but the swords of my host. And with him in Santangelo, and them in Rome—I am emperor, and thou art saint—and Lucrezia——"

"What is she?" said the Dominican, filling up the sudden pause which his patron made.

"She!—What can she be, overwhelmed with the dire report which must accompany her from Faenza, and the destruction of both her loving mallards?" said Cæsar, his eye flashing upon Fra Bruno, who replied, in a cold and untroubled tone, "A nun of the severest order?"

"Ay, to match the better with thee," replied Cæsar, laughing darkly. "Desperate and guilt-lost, what else can she be? Thou dost not think that we will kneel to her to implore her empress it with us in Rome, or aid thee in thy counsels of reform against her most dear sire?"

"And on the citation of my nameless beggars Monsignor d'Enna shall have order to send her to Rome?—A miracle indeed!" said Fra Bruno, with a smile of profound satisfaction.

"Ferrara will not interfere to prevent it, I tell

thee, nor whatever farther falls excite much marvel," replied the duke. "And now let us each to our tasks. I will trust in none to give instructions to the butler and his cupbearers but myself. Our sire is a Spanish drinker, but the weather is hot. Yet, Migueloto, six bottles of the same quality with that wine miraculous may serve our turn; and we two will content us with those sealed with lead, albeit not so honourable nor special as those marked with the silver crowns intended for our guests!"

"'Tis impossible suspicion should arise, my lord," replied Migueloto.

"But there must be some signal to the butler, when he is to serve from this priceless bin to our expectant well-wishers," said Cæsar, thoughtfully. "The word shall be, that I would he should also send me a salver of peaches; they shall be of the number of the condemned, and gathered by mine own hand. And now to thy preparations also, friar; for the moments hurry past."

Fra Bruno gave a slight start, as if he had been lost in meditation; but he immediately complied, and with a bend retired.

"The time shall yet come—when thy work is done—that I will learn wherefore thou hast so specially worked on me," said Cæsar, following him with a long unquiet gaze. "Migueloto, see that all be prepared; and if the dark stranger from Faenza comes hither, send him instantly to me at my palace."

With these words the ducal conspirator parted from his accomplice for a time, and each hastened to

fulfil some important task connected with the grand blow meditated.

The hours passed on rapidly laden with destiny as they might be, and the festive company invited to the feast in the Vatican vineyard were fast inundating its green arcades hung with thick bunches of the ripe grape. Tidings were rife of an extraordinary assemblage of the people in the square of St. Peter, to witness the baptism of a Jewess by their new saint; but no one of the invited dared to stay away, lest his absence should be construed into a mark of disaffection.

The pontifical court was assembled in a natural saloon, formed of elms united by vine-suckers; and thither the pontiff and the Duke of Romagna, attended by a magnificent group of cardinals and nobles, arrived. It was noticed, principally for the darkness of his garb, and wearing his vizor closed, that a Knight of St. John was among the pontiff's retinue.

But the agitated look of the pontiff excited and absorbed the general attention, and his pallor could scarcely be accounted for even by the excessive heat, which was but just beginning to yield to the freshening of the evening breeze. Cæsar also wore an aspect of inward perturbation, more especially when his eye fell upon the Knight of St. John; but the inquiry in it was answered by a significant nod which wonderfully reassured and inspirited him; so that, until he suddenly remembered that he had another part to play, his manner had in it something of a wild gaiety.

Alexander sat for some minutes in deep silence, listening apparently to the compliments which Cæsar addressed to the new cardinals, as Burciardo presented them with his usual formal state and set forms of speech.

"The most reverend Giovanni Castellar Valentino, Archbishop of Trani; Francesco Remolino, of Lerida, ambassador of the Catholic kings; Francesco Loderini, Bishop of Volterra; Melchior Copis, of Germania, Bishop of Brixen; Niccolò Fiesco, Bishop of Frejus; Francesco de Sprate, Spaniard, Bishop of Leon; Adriano Castellense da Corneto, Bishop, Clerk of the Chamber, Treasurer General, and Secretary of Briefs; Francesco Iloris Valentino, Bishop of Elva, Patriarch of Constantinople, and Pro-secretary of the holiness of our lord the pope; Jacomo Casanuova also Valentino, Prothonotary and Secret Chamberlain of his holiness;" were all duly announced, and received Cæsar's courteous and gracious greetings.

"We miss the Cardinal of Modena, as we hear the Datary hath become?—Alack, how we forget ourselves—the good man is gone!" said Cæsar, as the last of the scarlet-robed dignitaries paid his homage. "But the church is indeed enriched in many senses with additions so illustrious—all chosen indeed by heavenly inspiration; for what other was there in the matter, though we cannot boast that we discern one among you of those whom we ardently recommended in our prayers to such an honour! Yet, albeit we had no part in your elevations, most

reverend lords, we heartily rejoice in it, and have given this feast to show our satisfaction."

"Nephew,—and to prove that your satisfaction is no less politic and just than generous, hear us," said Alexander. "The Sacred College, to show that any report of ill-affection to your person, or ignorance of your merits, wronged all equally, have unanimously recommended to us a measure to which we have given our consent, touched by our knowledge of your great and hitherto but meanly recompensed deservings, whereby we have resolved to change your ducal title to that of sovereignty, and create you King of Romagna!"

Cæsar himself was staggered for several instants; but regaining his resolution, he replied with strangely brief and cold thanks—

"Romagna! We fear it will become a sound which even a kingly addition cannot make pleasant in our ear," he said. "Is it by your paternity's command that the Duchess of Ferrara delays in Faenza?"

"Dost thou fear the lady will take thy city from thee, Cæsar?" said the pontiff with a start.

"Nay—but, signor, for his valour I had made Sir Reginald le Beaufort my captain of Faenza; and there are reasons, as your paternity may remember, wherefore the Duchess of Ferrara should not tarry where he is master. And—for I must be bold—I would beseech you send her word to hasten on her journey, lest report should wrong us all."

"Some wine! I am faint at heart! Yet it is true,

Cæsar—we have heard of this! The ravages of the Vitelli affright her; but her lord is with her now, and will give her courage," said Alexander, with a strong shudder, which Cæsar remarked not without satisfaction.

"Nay, then, let us all pledge each other in a loving quaff," said the duke. "In Urbino I found some precious stores, whereof I mean to feast understanding palates, though I play the niggard ever after. Bid Messer Antonio send me of the scarlet flasks, cupbearer; and with it the *salver of peaches* which I gathered myself from Donna Lucrezia's favourite wall."

Don Migueloto at this instant made his appearance from among a crowd of the courtiers; and, stepping reverently towards the pontiff, knelt before him, and seemed to await permission to speak, which Cæsar immediately gave, by exclaiming, "What ails thee, castellain? what would thy twittering visage say?"

"Signor, the friar who escaped from Santangelo, and who has already excited so many tumults, is now engaged, in defiance of my prohibition, in baptizing a Jewess in the square of St. Peter, and delivering a seditious harangue to the populace," replied the Catalan. "Moreover, the woman is mad, and her kindred declare that 'tis done but to secure an inheritance to the Dominicans, which the wealthiest and most answerable of her tribe await without to certify."

"Go, give the Jewess to her friends, and seize the monk in his holiness's name! These seditions grow dangerous," said Cæsar, imperiously.

"Nay, we will have the monk and his convert both before us. Let the Jews have audience, and we will ourself judge whether she be sane, or as mad as some of us that go about unshackled," said Alexander, with sudden impetuosity.

"Holy father, what needs it, when we have learned that it is the mad wench that played such strange gambols of discourse to you in the jubilee time?" said Cæsar, somewhat alarmedly.

"Thus it shall be, or we will learn who is more the master in Rome!" said Alexander, with increasing severity; and then, with a profound and gloomy sigh, he looked round to Sir Reginald, and said, "Knight, we may depend on thee. Take the Swiss; you have our command."

"It may arouse some sudden commotion, which we have no strength in Rome to resist," said Cæsar; "specially if the Jewess be seized, as it will seem, to be delivered to the vengeance of her tribe."

"On that this knight may exercise some discretion; he hath the quality, and needs it," said the pontiff with another sigh, which Cæsar interpreted favourably; more especially as the messenger from Faenza answered his inquisitive gaze with a deep bend; and his attention was now attracted by the arrival of the chief butler, with his retinue of cupbearers, and the precious wines in the scarlet crystal. Sir Reginald instantly made his exit from the retinue, and Cæsar watched the butler so anxiously as he opened the bottles, that although the castellain kept his eye fixed on him for some signal, it was not until he had observed that his own goblet, and Alexander's,

and that of the Cardinal Adrian di Corneto, whom for some reason he chose to preserve, were filled from the bottles sealed with lead, and all the others from those of silver, that he raised his head.

"The times are dangerous, and it is good we be prepared for worse," he then said. "Migueloto, post my guard round the vineyard, to keep the rabble from following their prophet ringleader in; and have the gates of Santangelo opened, and your forces arrayed, that we may at least lodge the person of his holiness in safety if any disorder should arise."

Alexander's agitation visibly increased; but the apparent submission to the order to admit Miriam with the monk somewhat cleared the clouds from his brow; and he again, and with many added encomiums, declared his purpose of raising Cæsar to the sovereign dignity, by desiring all present to drink to the health of the King of Romagna. Le Beaufort had disappeared almost the instant he received the command, and Don Migueloto followed with equal rapidity; so that the guards with which the former hastened on his commission were promptly replaced by the fierce and well-appointed soldiery of the Borgia.

Cæsar now deigned for the first time to express some gratitude, though he laughingly complained that he was thus debarred from sharing the rich draught. But when the assemblage arose, and each of the newly made cardinals, holding his full goblet in his hand, with emulous zeal awaited the signal from the pontiff to drain it, Cæsar's countenance shone with a brilliant expression of joy and eager-

ness and fearful mirth which produced a very unanswering effect on the pontiff. His nervy hand trembled as he raised his goblet, and after a momentary hesitation he set it down, thrust his hand into the breast of his robe, and exclaimed, "We have left it in our chamber.—Monsignor Caraffa, hasten to the palace, and bring us our reliquary.—Yet, no, no, we had forgotten—ourself parted with it to one in assurance of safeguard," he continued, but not in time to prevent the ready zeal of the young bishop whom he had addressed. Then somewhat confusedly glancing around, he raised the goblet with an eager snatch, and without giving the toast, drained it.

"Signor, you have forgotten the health of—the King of Romagna," said Cæsar, smiling, but looking disappointedly at the guests—who stared at one another and did not drink.

"'Tis true!—a negligence easily repaired this burning noon.—Refill!" replied the pontiff, hurriedly. "We had forgotten—not forgotten—but, we know not how, our thoughts were wandering abroad, for it scarcely seems we are at home since we miss that sunshine which hath departed from among us for ever!—Our age grows very lonely.—But it will teach us henceforth not to make gaps in the hearths of others. Mercy becomes old age, and henceforth we mean to listen rather to her gentle teachings than to the stern clamour of a justice too exact;—to the health of the King of Romagna!"

Again the pontiff drained the goblet, and this time he was imitated by the whole court—to the unbounded satisfaction of Cæsar, whose eyes, lit with

malicious triumph, rapidly darted from cup to cup, to be certain that none had shunned the doom to which he had dedicated them. But all had with emulous zeal drained to the last drops.

Lurid with his dire inward joy, Cæsar then arose to return the pledge, and drink the health of the new cardinals; in which Alexander, hoping to quell the agitation which grew upon his frame with every moment of expectation, again joined. Cæsar drained his ample goblet so heartily that he even tilted it, and clinked the gold, to show his new friends the zeal with which he had returned their love; and willing to make certain of his victims, immediately turned to the chief butler, who had arrived with a salver of peaches, and commanded that the goblets should again be filled from his precious stores, to drink to the safe and *speedy* progress of the Duchess of Ferrara to her new capital.

Alexander very eagerly joined in this toast; and unconsciously, in the tumult of his inward thoughts, and probably for the first time since his elevation to the pontifical dignity, in public, he styled Lucrezia his beloved daughter, the King of Romagna's sister.

The cardinals looked at one another somewhat scandalized, and Cæsar exclaimed, with a covert and strange sneer in his tone, "Nay—for none can deny his holiness hath ever treated my sister as his daughter—beloved indeed!"

Alexander's eye fell for an instant with an indescribable and most terrific expression on the duke, and all the marble placidness of his visage could scarcely

turn the darting lightning of that fierce, inquiring glance. The pontiff then turned away, and glanced in the direction whence the monk was to be expected —who now appeared, walking between two Swiss soldiers, without Miriam or any other company but that of his brother Dominican, Fra Biccocco.

All attention was immediately concentrated on the friar; and when he halted before the magnificent festal groups, and drew himself to his full height without any sign of reverence or respect for the august presence in which he stood, his visage perfectly bloodless but instinct with terrible though silent passion—an awe sunk upon the assemblage like that which falls upon the souls of men when a tempest gathers and pauses ere it bursts.

The Duke of Romagna was the only one untroubled by this gloomy guest's arrival, if guest he might be called; he gave the monk a nod, with a significant glance at the stained goblets, which he comprehended, for a fearful smile lighted his worn and gloomy features.

"Where is thy convert, monk?—We bade her come with thee to our presence, that we might adjudge between thee and the Jews, who declare her mad," said Alexander.

"She is detained with them and my sequence of believers, at the gates, with the reviling Jews, by the guard of the Duke of Romagna," replied the Dominican, sedately. "The black knight whom your holiness sent craves your direct command to admit her, or permission to break a way through the opposers."

"Burciardo, go and command in our name, and on peril of the denier's head, that none refuse admittance to the Knight of St. John, the Jews, and Miriam—ourself sit here in judgment!" said Alexander, with a violence and impetuosity which drowned the words in which Cæsar began to utter a peremptory refusal, and which sent the Dean of Strasburgh with unwonted and undignified despatch on his errand.

"Be it even so.—I care not," said Cæsar, with an indifference contradicted by the quiver in his eyes. "I meddle not with the convert, though they say she is fair for a Jewess.—But, monk, since I am Gonfalonier of Rome, I may presume to question thee what doctrines these are thou preachest, stirring the people with rebellious and heretic misbeliefs?"

"My doctrines, Gonfalonier, are matters beyond your province. The church alone hath the power to decide on them," replied the monk, calmly.

"Let me hear them, then—I am the church," said Alexander, graciously, but still much agitated. "Let me hear thy projects, for if they be good and wholesome I will myself aid in them to the uttermost—for indeed we feel that we have delayed the work too long."

"My projects are, then—to root out the simony of Roderic Borgia, falsely styled Pope Alexander the Sixth!—which hath shaken the pillars of the faith in all men's minds, and made the very heavens waver above our heads, as doubting whether to fall and crush earth back into chaos!—To hurl destruction

on him and all his accursed brood!—To cleanse the church of their defilements, and bring back the wandering generations of mankind to her pale; to demonstrate the justice of heaven in the sudden, terrific, and utter downfall of the flagitious race who have dared to steal even the lightnings of God to ravage his earth!" replied the Dominican.

"He is mad—most mad!" said Alexander, after a long pause of profound astonishment. "And as a madman, let him rave unchastised."

"He hath a prophet's boldness, and perchance his mission," said Cæsar, not altogether affecting the awe which his low tone denoted. "And look how all the steeps of the Vatican are blackening with his mob! I trust that we shall at least have the way open to Santangelo, that we may have time given us to bring our answers to this miracle-worker from Bracciano."

"It reminds me well, Cæsar. I did intend to visit your dungeons of Santangelo, to do some acts of grace and mercy there. Among the rest, I promised Lucrezia to learn whether Fiamma Colonna is there as thy prisoner, or thy guest," said Alexander with sternness, and evidently startled.

"Your son-in-law of Ferrara hath generously taken care of her, signor!—since Capua, we have not seen nor heard aught of her fate," replied Cæsar, betraying some slight alarm. "Our Lady grant she make no mischief in Ferrara! But thou, monk, shouldst have better assurances than visions to support thee in so dangerous a task as this which thou announcest."

"This very night had I one, in which I will confide rather than in the spears of ten thousand!" replied Fra Bruno. "Methought I beheld a putrid carcass breed a snake, which came forth and stung the murderer, and straight he swelled and burst; and it was given to me to crush the reptile even with mine unsandalled feet, and the carcass resumed its life, and became lovely and fragrant as one whom ye have all seen—and shall see no more!"

"But the ancient prophets showed visible signs of their divine commission; and where are thine?" replied Cæsar, mockingly, but with a look which the friar understood, and returned with one of mingled loathing and triumph.

"What sign can be more manifest," he returned, "than that Cæsar Borgia—the fratricide more cruel than Cain! the tyrant more remorseless than Nero! the infidel more unbelieving than Judas!—should project the reformation of the church? Were it more if these ruins which strew the wastes of the seven hills were suddenly to rise again in all their magnificence?"

"Monk—though thou art mad there is a malice in thy ravings which may distinguish thee from thy fellow maniacs!" said Cæsar, kindling with the passions which this address was so likely to rouse.

"I appeal to your holy sire's protection—promised by this sign," returned the monk, with a bitter smile, and producing Alexander's golden box of the Eucharist.

"It is so," said the pontiff, with a fathomless

gloom in his tones. "Cæsar, since thou deemest the monk a prophet honour him as such."

"But ye demand my proofs," continued the Dominican, hurriedly, "and I answer—Am I not here at liberty? Have I not compelled the stones of Santangelo to yield up my convertite? Yea, and I have summoned, Alexander, thy pernicious daughter from her adulteries in Faenza—and she shall obey."

"Sacrilegious traitor! what wouldst thou say?—of what adulteries dost thou accuse our daughter?" shouted Alexander, glaring from the monk to his now evident accomplice.

"Simonist! although thou didst unlawfully and irreligiously dissolve the betrothal of thy daughter to the son of him who saved thy life, and whom the pride of thy ill-gotten empire taught thee to disdain, it is he who calls the wife of Alfonso of Ferrara adultress! the dallier with Reginald le Beaufort, adultress!" returned the friar, with equal vehemence. "It is he who even by the means of the detested monster, thy son, brings her back to Rome—there to exhibit before all the world the greatest miracle of all—by resigning her to the church whose glory she has darkened so long, and which that act shall restore to tenfold splendour!"

"And where is he, this wondrous first husband of Lucrezia? Idiot, what ravest thou?" exclaimed Cæsar, convulsively clutching his dagger, and shrinking from the fierce gaze which his sire now turned upon him.

"He is here!—I!—for I am Bernard of Lanfranc,

whom the mean pride and tyranny of Rodrigo Borgia deprived of his betrothed wife, and forced into a cloister!" returned the Dominican.

"If thou art Bernard of Lanfranc, why hast thou hidden thyself so long from my gratitude, which would only have fallen short of the absurd sacrifice of my child to thy years and student gloom?" said Alexander, with amazement. "I know not that I ever saw thee but once—a score of years are gone—a pallid student in Salamanca. All that relates to thy advancement I will perform; but rave not of Lucrezia, for I tell thee thy summons will reach Faenza too late, and here comes one who brought us the joyful intelligence of her escape from a prodigious snare—of her safe re-union with her husband, Alfonso of Ferrara, and arrival in his strong capital; where, if an old man's blessing may avail, long may they flourish in each other's love, and their children's children repeat her beauty and his princely virtues to all posterity. Welcome him, Cæsar, it is your captain of Faenza, Sir Reginald le Beaufort!"

At this moment Le Beaufort entered the leafy saloon, accompanied by Burciardo and the neophyte, Miriam, who wore a long white linen hood and garments, and was intently watching a butterfly which in a singular manner flew before them, fluttering in the hot air. Hearing the pontiff's words, Sir Reginald instantly raised his vizor, and stood revealed to the amazed and fear-struck eyes of Cæsar.

But the effect upon the Dominican was still more

powerful, and for some time he glared vacantly at the young knight, as if he had received some blow which had stunned memory and consciousness.

"Look yonder, how it wears his pretty coat—purple velvet, powdered with gold!" exclaimed the young Jewess, vacantly watching the sportive movements of the butterfly, which flew over the table towards the pontiff.

"At least—but I will have vengeance!" said the monk, recovering from his shock, and clutching his convertite, he drew her violently forward, and tore off her veil. "Miriam, this is the reward I promised thee for thy faith—vengeance on the murderer of thy Francesco! Look round and tell us which is he!"

There was a short pause of terrific and breathless silence, during which Miriam glanced with frantic eagerness around the groups, until her eye fell on the visage of Cæsar, now flaming with demoniac passions and fear—and then with a shriek which seemed as if it pierced to the lofty heavens above, she pointed at him. "He is there—he is there! Oh, give me justice, judge, and slay the murderer of Francesco!"

And she flew with astonishing swiftness to Alexander's chair, and threw herself frantically at his feet.

Cæsar started up like a wild beast roused in his lair, and seemed preparing to spring upon the hapless Jewess, when Alexander himself arose, and with a countenance awful in its excess of anguish, ex-

claimed, "Receive my malediction, Cain!—Advance farther, and mine own hand—guards, level your spears."

Le Beaufort's sword instantly gleamed over the couchant figure of the Jewess.

"And now hear mine," said Fra Bruno, his eyes gleaming with supernatural and insane fierceness, his attitude that of a prophet of old denouncing woes. "Hear me, Rodrigo and Cæsar Borgia! Heaven is at last weary of your crimes—earth and heaven alike—and the hour of doom, and vengeance, and justice, and destruction, is at hand! Tyrants, oppressors, betrayers! within the hour I command ye both to render up your detestable souls to vengeance, cursed with the assurance of each other's hatred and guilt; and on the answer to this summons do I stake my claims to be held as a prophet of God or a lying impostor of the fiend!"

"Indeed I am grievously held!—Parricide, hast thou poisoned my drink?" said Alexander, his colour changing to a strong livid tint; and, after a momentary struggle, and vacant grasping in the air, he staggered, and was supported back into his chair by Le Beaufort.

"My heart is on fire—but of this I am not guilty, Alexander! Hellish sorcerer, hast thou poisoned us?" said Cæsar, in whose own breast the direful potion had begun its work.

"Nay, signor, I but changed the leaden corks for silver ones; an honourable distinction due to your rank and merit," replied the monk, with a smile of unutterable meaning.

"Bear me away—I am dead—knight, to the Vatican—not to Santangelo, not to Santangelo!" groaned the pontiff; and with one last terrific glance at Cæsar he added, "This is justice!" and sank senseless in the arms of Le Beaufort and Burciardo.

"Some antidote! some antidote!—Notte and Morta!—A thousand crowns for either!—Bring them hither!" yelled Cæsar.

"My lord, they are, even as I left Santangelo, dead! Fly, fly, my lord!—Monsignor d'Enna has arrived with fearful news!" said Migueloto, who at this instant rushed in, and stared aghast at the dismal spectacle which he beheld. Miriam perceived him instantly, and with a shriek of terror darted from behind the pontiff's chair, where she had crouched, and fled with the rapidity of a startled hare down one of the walks of the vineyard.

"Oh, there is no hope then!—All is lost!—The poison burns through my entrails!" said Cæsar, staggering and becoming pale as if already a corpse. "But vengeance! Seize the sorcerer, Migueloto—he has poisoned us! Father!—let him at least not deem that I have slaughtered him! Help! Fiamma! Oh, Fiamma! She—an antidote! Keep off those fiery forms! The dark one!—he in the glistering turban! Keep him off—he tears my heart out with his burning pincers! All those grisly faces! Flames, flames, flames!—And this is hell! Horror, horror, horror! Help, rescue, Fiamma!—Help!" And he, too, sank senseless to the ground.

In a wonderfully brief space it was known all over Rome that the pontiff lay in a dying state in the Vatican, and that the Duke of Romagna was conveyed, in a state of similar desperation, to Santangelo. The confusion and tumults which immediately arose threatened general ruin; and for some days the city was abandoned to every species of disorder and violence. The slender forces of the pope, under orders of Sir Reginald le Beaufort, limited their exertions to defending all the accesses to the Vatican, and the person of the dying pontiff. Alexander lingered during eight days of inconceivable agonies; and although closely attended by Le Beaufort during the whole period, and frequently recovering his memory and consciousness, not once did he pronounce the name of Lucrezia or Cæsar; and the only sign of remembrance of either which he gave was within a few minutes of his death, when, extending his hand to Le Beaufort, he desired him to draw a ring off it, and destroy it before his sight. But the convulsions which overtook him instantly compelled Le Beaufort to pause in executing the behest; and after the pontiff's death, when he was about to crush it, although he remembered that it was the ring he had borne from Lucrezia, Master Burciardo stopped him by showing how it contained a wondrously small but beautiful miniature of Lucrezia. It was not destroyed.

Meanwhile nothing was known with certainty of Cæsar's fate; but it was reported that he was still alive, and that a sorceress who had long been confined in Santangelo, by spells and the administration of marvellous remedies, such as sewing him up in the

body of a bull ripped open alive, and plunging him into baths said to be of human blood, maintained him so against all the power of the poison he had swallowed. Meanwhile his bodily tortures seemed not to have diminished the vigour and activity of his mind; and the instant the death of the pope took place, his troops took possession of the Vatican, from which Le Beaufort but just effected his retreat in time, and Migueloto stripped the palace and treasury of Alexander of all its riches, jewels, plate, and gold, to a prodigious amount, which he transferred to Santangelo.

Absorbed in projects of revenge, and of assistance to the beleaguered Orsini in Bracciano, Le Beaufort sent intelligence of what had happened to all the cities and personages whom he thought likely to take advantage of the disasters of their tyrant, and distract the attention of his forces. The Colonna accordingly hastened on Rome, assisted by a large Spanish force; Urbino, Pesaro, Camerino, Piombino, and the Vitelli, burst into open revolt; the Malatesta rushed upon Rimini; the Baglioni, aided by two powerful nobles of the Orsini family, and Venetian succours, recovered Perugia, and advanced on Bracciano to raise the siege. But already this task was accomplished by the division of Cæsar's forces, rendered necessary by the universal outbreak, and to protect his person in Rome itself; and ere the rescuers reached Bracciano, Fabio Orsino, breathing destruction to the very name of Borgia, entered Rome with a powerful force.

Le Beaufort hastened to join the Orsini on their

entry, and he went to the bridge of Santangelo to meet Fabio, while over the castle still waved the Borgian flag. And from the young chieftain he learned that Paolo Orsino had, in dying, solemnly commended his vengeance to Sir Reginald le Beaufort; and his last words implored that he would never return to his own land until he had avenged him by the destruction of the tyrant. Moved with the sight of the young orphan, and all the recollections of his ancient friendship, Le Beaufort—gnashing his teeth at the flag which flaunted defiance from the battlements of the castle—accepted the charge with an oath, which was echoed in an unanimous roar by the incensed clansmen around.

Meanwhile, though Le Beaufort had ordered the most diligent research, no tidings had been heard of Miriam; and the fate of Fra Bruno, who had been dragged a prisoner into Santangelo, could only be conjectured by the fact that Cæsar had attempted to quiet the tumult of the monk's partizans by accusing him of sorcery, on the evidence of Sultan Zem's paramour, long believed an accomplice in the unholy art. But now, as the gloomy procession of the Avengers crossed the bridge of Santangelo, an old boatman shouted from the water below for assistance, and appeared slowly rowing to the shore with a drenched female corpse, partially covered with weeds and slime, stretched in his boat. The boatman was old Schiavone, and the corpse was that of Miriam; but how she came to her dismal fate, whether by her own act, or the violence of others, remains for ever a mystery. Yet those who were acquainted

even with the outlines of the dismal story of the Jewess, heard not without emotion that her body was found almost in the very spot where formerly that of her unfortunate lover, the Duke of Gandia, was discovered.

The Orsini and Le Beaufort were determined on avenging themselves to the utmost on Cæsar, and to rest only satisfied with his utter destruction; but the great force with which he kept Santangelo and the Vatican, and the commands of the Sacred College, which had now assumed the government of the city, and laboured to clear it of all the contending parties during the election of a new pontiff, made the enterprise very difficult. Fabio, with the subtlety of his house, now endeavoured to stimulate the fanaticism of the populace to aid him in an attack by calling upon them to rescue the miraculous monk from Cæsar's hands; and the people were soon excited to the height which he desired, and clamoured for arms to assail Santangelo, when suddenly a counter move of the Borgia disconcerted the plan. It was announced that the sorcerer monk had himself demanded an ordeal by fire, to prove the truth of his mission, and the falsehood of the accusation against him; and that Cæsar had consented he should undergo it, in the presence of all the people, in the square of St. Peter.

The prospect of a spectacle so extraordinary, and of a visible miracle, excited the curiosity and fanaticism of the populace to a degree at which it was in vain to contend with the impetus; but Fabio and Sir Reginald resolved to be present to take advantage

of aught that might happen to stir the people, not without hope that the Dominican had only demanded the ordeal that he might throw himself upon the protection of his followers, and of the Borgia's enemies.

A great pile of faggots, interlaid with peat, and tow steeped in tar, straw, and other inflammable substances, was erected in the square of St. Peter; and on the day on which the deformed and bloated corpse of Alexander, with scarcely any honour or funeral pomp, was hurried to the sepulchre, an immense mass congregated to witness the experiment. Sir Reginald and Fabio, with a chosen party of horse, were grouped around the pile, ready to act as occasion might direct.

Surrounded by a potent body of Cæsar's guard from Santangelo, came the devoted monk, Don Migueloto himself walking beside him, with bare head, and much appearance of reverence. Fra Bruno's cowl was thrown back, and although his eyes were fixed on the ground, there was nothing in his steady walk and calm countenance to denote any real intention of undergoing so fearful an ordeal, until Fra Biccocco, breaking from the crowd, threw himself sobbing at his feet, and implored him to speak but the word, and the people would rescue him. Fabio Orsino shouted the same assurance, and instantly there arose a terrific uproar among the masses, which was silenced as if by magic when the friar waved his hand to claim attention, and spoke.

"Savonarola!" he exclaimed, and paused to satisfy himself that there was a silence—and a breathless

one indeed reigned over the whole crowded mass—"Savonarola failed in the ordeal which he invoked, for his heart was broken by the ingratitude of the people whom he had saved, and his spirit quailed under sore temptations of the flesh! I have taught his doctrines among ye,—what I have done I have done,—but whether by inspiration of a god or of a fiend, I know not, and will now set at rest for ever and for ever. Your love supports me—my sinews shrink not—my spirit is resolved; and if my cause be heaven's, let heaven now give me a sign, and restore peace to my warring spirit, or prevent me from leading mankind astray to the flames of hell, mistaking them for the distant light of paradise! Therefore, kindle the pile! I will pass through the flames, and the earth and my own heart shall believe in my mission; or let them devour me even to my ashes, that not a taint of my existence may remain upon her breast! Tric-troc!—kindle the flames!"

"O, my master, my master! my light! my glory! I beseech thee have mercy upon thyself!" said Fra Biccocco, in an agony of grief; but it seemed as if the populace attached some extraordinary meaning to the unknown sounds uttered by the monk, and they unanimously murmured to one another, "Tric-troc!" in low, awe-struck, and inquiring tones.

"What wouldst thou have, faithful brother?" said Fra Bruno, with a momentary faltering in his tone. "What has life any longer for me? Dost thou grudge me the expiation which may redeem my soul? or deemest thou that it is better to rot in the dull

earth than to mingle essences with the pure, rational, and sublime spirit of fire?"

"Let him pass through the ordeal, and I will believe—yea, give up the duke and his sorceress to your vengeance," said Migueloto, with a strange mixture of doubt and mockery in his tones.

"It shall not be!—let us rescue him by force!" exclaimed Sir Reginald; but Fabio Orsino himself shared in the general delirium of superstition, and baring his head, replied, "Nay, in God's name, let us abide the event."

The populace by their shouts and murmurs gave assent to this conclusion, and even the once gibing dwarf, Paschino, who was close to the pile, with an inarticulate murmur, for he had lost his tongue. Migueloto's guardsmen then hastily set fire to the faggots, while the Dominican knelt, and was for some moments engaged in rapt prayer, and the whole multitude looked on in silent and terrific expectation. The pile was soon in one vast pyramidal glow of flames and fiery smoke; Fra Bruno arose, embraced his faithful coadjutor, gave one steady look upwards to the sun, crossed himself, and rushed into the flames. Those whose horror permitted them to continue gazing, beheld his dark and lofty form stand for an instant on the flaming summit of the pile, with its arms stretched upward;—an universal shout of triumph arose! But the next moment and he had sunk in the centre of the pile, into the raging furnace, which instantaneously enveloped him in its flames.

"Rescue! save the madman!" cried Le Beaufort, but no man echoed him, nor seconded him in the

attempt which he made to tear down the fiery pile and rescue the unfortunate ordealist, when his attention was suddenly attracted by Bampton's cry of "Beware—treason!" and the old man darted before his lord just in time to receive in his own breast a pointed instrument which Migueloto had aimed at Le Beaufort, and which immediately opened like a fan with a dozen edges in the wound. Finding that his treacherous project had failed in its object, Migueloto echoed the cry of "Treason!" and shouted to his horsemen to return to Santangelo. But fast as he rode, Le Beaufort burst through the ranks of his men, and overtook him alone on the bridge of Santangelo. The castellain seemed in no humour to face his enraged follower, and his horse, affrighted with the rider's terror and spurred to madness, leaped the balustrade of the bridge, and rolled over and over with Migueloto down an abutment until both reached the river—a mingled mass of gore and bruises! Panic-struck, and pursued by Fabio and the Orsini, Migueloto's band rushed past without venturing to assail the victor, and were driven into Santangelo; but whether luckily or not for himself, the wounded castellain was rescued from the water by some fishermen, and consigned as a prisoner of the state to the dungeons of the Capitol, preserved with difficulty from the unabated fury of the Orsini, to obtain a confession of his master's crimes and projects.

Bampton died in the arms of his young lord, in a few hours after he had received his wound, without being able to utter a single articulate sound, excepting once, "Home, home!" which were the last sounds

breathed from his lacerated lungs, adding in his death a bitter item to Le Beaufort's oath of vengeance.

Meanwhile the fanaticism of the people took a new turn, and convinced by his failure of their prophet's falsehood, they surrounded the furnace, and permitted no one to approach until the whole was reduced to ashes; and it is said that not even a bone remained in the heap to reward the pious search of Biccocco, and some other devotees whose faith remained unshaken.

The Sacred College now laboured to restore some peace to the city, that it might proceed to the election of a new pontiff; but finding that while the armies of the different factions were in possession of Rome it was utterly impossible, in concurrence with the ambassadors of all the European powers, they determined on a measure of vigour. They decreed that Cæsar, the Orsini, and the Colonna should leave the city with all their troops; and as the French army was already at Nepi, and the Spaniards on the frontiers of Naples, and both threatened to unite for the purpose of executing the order, none of the factions dared to disobey. Cæsar in vain alleged his infirm health; the Orsini and Colonna refused to leave the city unless he was also compelled to quit it; and moreover he found himself rapidly deserted by his best soldiers, for Prospero Colonna published a command from the Kings of Spain, recalling all their subjects to their own standard in Naples.

A convention was made and sworn to by the chiefs of the factions, and by all with great reluctance, reserving to themselves the hope and the in-

tention of revenge, but induced by the advantage of removing Cæsar from Rome, where his power might overawe the conclave into choosing a new pontiff in his interest. But though Fabio was compelled to retire to Bracciano, Le Beaufort still lingered with some vague expectation of an opportunity of vengeance arising—when to his astonishment and anger Cæsar himself demanded that he should have the care of the gate at which he was to leave the city, declaring that he would trust in no other. At first Le Beaufort utterly refused the request; but a thought occurred to him, and he complied at the reiterated entreaties of the council, with intent in some measure to give vent to the loathing and hatred which filled his soul.

Accordingly he witnessed the departure of the Borgia; and escorted by thirteen pieces of artillery, and the potent body of Italian soldiery who still remained true to him, Cæsar came—no longer as a chieftain and a warrior, but borne upon a litter by twelve of his halberdiers, who relieved each other at intervals, and closely curtained from observation. A war-horse was indeed led beside the couch by a page in a dark livery, who, when Sir Reginald demanded to speak with the duke, spurred in between them, and inquired his purpose with fierceness, at the same time plucking his hat over his brows, and raising an axe which he carried, as if he thought it possible to resist any intention against his master which the stalwart English knight might have formed. But finding that the retinue looked at the page as if awaiting his commands, Le Beaufort

briefly replied by handing his gauntlet to the youth, and desiring him to inform his lord that he challenged him to mortal combat, as a disloyal traitor, murderer, and recreant.

"Keep it, keep thy gauntlet; it is in vain, he cannot answer thee," returned the page, mournfully. "He but remembers at far intervals—the mighty mind is shattered even with its fabric, and no pillar remains to prop his falling fortunes!—Content you, knight, content you."

But as he spoke Cæsar himself drew the curtain of his litter, and glaring full with mad defiance and ferocity at his enemy—"Fiamma, give it me!" he said, stretching his withered hand. "Give it me—and I *will* live, if it be but for vengeance on this slave that hath destroyed an empire!"

Le Beaufort was so struck with the horrible spectacle which his enemy now presented, his fine visage bloated out of all comeliness, his whole body covered with black sores, that he made no reply, and stood motionless at the gate until the procession had vanished out of sight.

Thus baulked of his revenge, hopeless, and still consumed by a vain passion, but unable to prevail upon himself to return to his native land and fulfil his contract with his cousin, the Lady Alice, in an hour of utter despondency the remembrance of his parting words to Lucrezia struck Sir Reginald so forcibly, that in spite of every remonstrance of reason and his family he sent back the remnant of his archers to England, with a resignation of his pretensions to the lady's hand, and an announcement of his determina-

tion to enter into the order of the Knights Hospitallers of St. John. With this determination he left Rome, embarked for Rhodes, which was then the chief possession of the knights, and enrolled himself to serve his novitiate.

After a lapse of time, however, disgusted by the dissolution which reigned in the order, and moved by the entreaties of his aged parents, Le Beaufort changed his resolve. But he was finally determined by an event which renewed his longing to revenge his own wrongs and the death of his unfortunate friend, Paolo Orsino.

The declension of Cæsar's fortunes was as rapid as their rise, principally owing to a decay of mind, which continued after the corporeal effects of the poison were over, and rendered him a victim of the arts which he had himself so long practised. The wrath of his enemies was for awhile appeased by beholding him gradually stripped of all his power and possessions, until finally the treachery of the Spaniards completed his ruin, who rid Italy of his presence by sending him in captivity into their own country. There he was imprisoned for two years in the Castle of Medina del Campo; but the exertions of a faithful page who shared his captivity, and who procured him a rope, by which he lowered himself from the tower in which he was imprisoned, and had horses in readiness for his flight below, enabled him to make his escape into Navarre, where the king, his brother-in-law, received him with open arms. In the wars in which this prince was engaged with his vassals, Cæsar began to revive his ancient reputation

for military valour and success; and it was these tidings which determined Le Beaufort to relinquish his intention of remaining in the order of the Knights of St. John, at Rhodes.

Animated by an unceasing desire for vengeance, he journeyed through France to Navarre, and arrived at the city of Vienne, which was besieged by the King of Navarre and Cæsar Borgia, where he entered the service of its prince as a volunteer. The arrival of the renowned knight of England infused such courage into the besieged, who were scarcely inferior in number to their assailants, that it was determined to try the fortune of a sally. A general battle was the result, in which the Viennese were routed; and Cæsar, urging on the pursuit with great impetuosity, suddenly found his path crossed by a knight in the detested and ominous weeds of St. John.

Sir Reginald shouted aloud, "Cæsar Borgia, I am come to redeem my gauntlet!" and pausing for a moment until he thought that his enemy had time to prepare himself, he set his lance and drove full tilt at him. But Cæsar seemed suddenly struck with powerlessness; and though Le Beaufort could not check his own career, he felt that the Borgia's lance touched his breast as if scarcely held, while his own shivered the armour of his antagonist, and entered as deep as the head, and tearing away, left a large wound from which the blood rushed in a torrent. And yet Cæsar sat his steed for an instant of desperate endurance, and then fell backward from the saddle into the arms of a page, who had closely followed his lord's advance, sprang from his horse when the encounter took place,

and arrived only in time to receive him falling. The weight of the duke and his armour crushed down the faithful attendant with himself, and Sir Reginald dismounted to render assistance. When he arrived at his fallen antagonist, the page had removed his helmet, and he had raised himself on his elbow, continuing to glare fixedly at him, while the page distractedly endeavoured to stanch the gore which flowed from his large wound.

"Peace, peace, Fiamma—it is in vain! See you, he has come for me!" said Cæsar, in a low, horror-stricken tone. "It is Francesco!"

"Traitor! I am Reginald le Beaufort, who have repaid thee thus for all thy felonies, grieved only that thou diest not a felon's death," said Le Beaufort.

"Sir Reginald le Beaufort!—Nay, then, if thou art human—if thou art he!—Fiamma, give me way!" and dashing aside the hand with which she pressed a scarf to his wound, Cæsar sprang, as it seemed by a supernatural effort, upright on his feet to encounter his foe, and almost simultaneously fell dead beside the kneeling Colonna. The shriek with which she beheld the bleeding carcass whiten as she endeavoured again to raise the head, rang through Le Beaufort's memory in many an after year!

But the approach of a party of Navarrese horsemen compelled the English knight to look to his own safety, and to retire into the walls of Vienne, leaving the page stretched senseless on the breast of her too-well loved and ferocious lord.

We find it on record, that by the cares of a faithful attendant, who watched over the body of Cæsar until assistance came, it was conveyed to Pamplona, and buried with honours suitable to illustrious rank; and men were somewhat moved to consider the operations of divine justice, and the marvellous turns of fate, when they beheld all that remained of that ambitious and high-soaring existence buried as a mangled and vanquished soldier in the cathedral of which, in his youth, he had been a peaceful archbishop—if such a nature had ever in reality known peace.

Of the fate of that most faithful and most fortuneless paramour, who alone had remained true to him in every vicissitude, little is known with certainty, unless the conjecture of our chronicler is well founded, that she was identical with a pilgrim who visited nearly all the celebrated shrines of Europe, to offer prayer, and cause unnumbered masses to be said for the redemption of the soul of Cæsar Borgia, Duke of Romagna; and who died at Joppa, of the plague, on her way to visit the Holy Sepulchre with a similar intent.

Concerning the farther fortunes of Sir Reginald le Beaufort, the most diligent researches furnish us only with a few meagre facts. Undoubtedly he was the "potent and noble English knight, Sire Reginaldus," who negotiated the peace between the King of Navarre and his vassal, the Prince of Vienne. We also know with certainty, at least with genealogical certainty, that the founder of the Le Beaufort family married his cousin, the Lady Alicia de Beaufort, in

the year which closed the career of Cæsar Borgia, and that he had three sons and one daughter, called Lucretia; and that, at a subsequent period, he so zealously aided Henry VIII. in his Reformation labours, that not the least portion of the Le Beaufort estates at the present day consists in the three abbeys which their ancestor acquired as a reward for his services in restoring the church to her apostolic poverty.

Of the minor personages of the chronicle, it is known that Cæsar's general, Don Migueloto, was for many years imprisoned in Santangelo, and several times subjected to the torture, to make him discover where the riches of his lord and the plunder of the Vatican were concealed. It is said that he persevered to the last in refusing to divulge this secret; and although the manner of his death is not clearly known, there are not wanting obscure reports that he perished with a soldier whom he had corrupted, endeavouring to find his way to the subterraneous vault where the sorceress, Fiamma Colonna, had deposited the treasures of the Borgias, and where they still await a finder.

THE END.

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